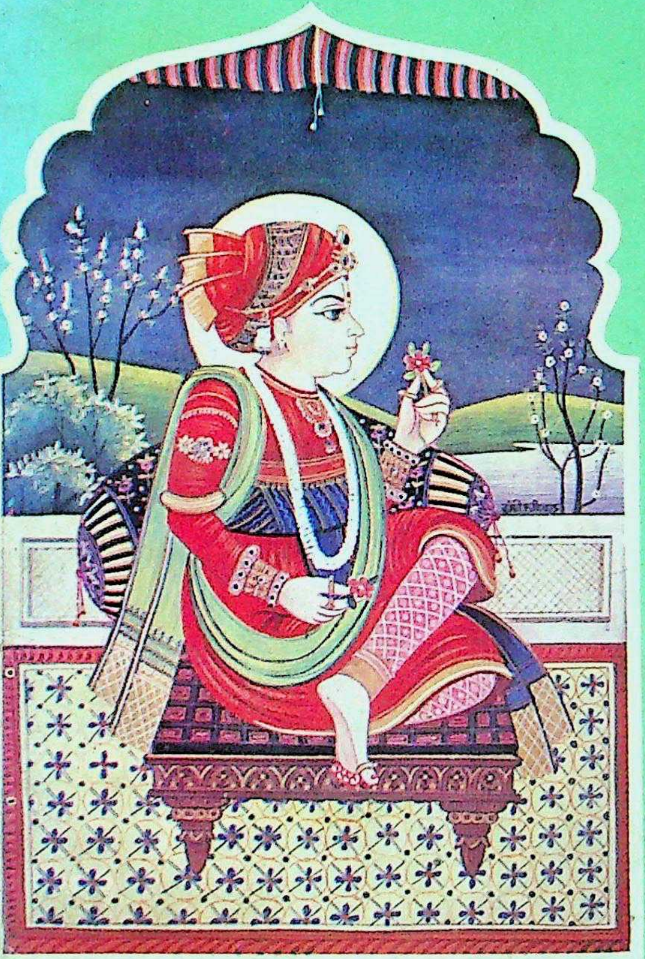
While singing with devotional fervour songs in praise of the Lord, an ardent devotee should concentrate on the form of the Lord so intently as to lose self-consciousness.

—Lord Swaminarayan



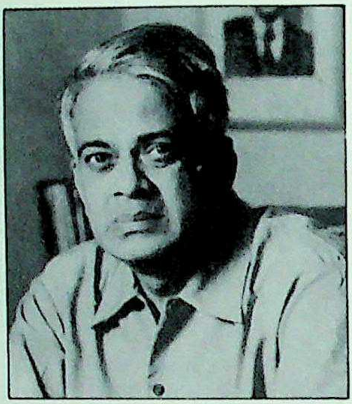
The Cup of Love

Fifty-Four Poems of SWAMINARAYAN SAINT-POETS

Versions by
Harindra Dave

Edited by M. V. Kamath with an Introduction

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-400007



Born in 1921 in Karnataka, M. V. Kamath is one of the most prominent journalists in the country today. Few newspapermen in India have the width of his experience and expertise. He has worked as a reporter, sub-editor, columnist, editorial writer and special correspondent in several international capitals including Bonn, Paris, Washington and the United Nations. Besides being an active journalist, Kamath has written several books prominent among them being **Kissinger — The Incomplete Diplomat**, **The United States and India 1776-1976** and the **Philosophy of Death and Dying.** At present he is the Editor of the **Illustrated Weekly of India.**

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

Rigveda, I-89-i.

THE CUP OF LOVE

(Fifty-four poems of Swaminarayan saint-poets.)

Sponsored By

BOCHASANWASI SHREE AKSHAR PURUSHOTTAM
CHARITABE TRUST,

AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT

ON THE OCCASION OF THE
BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS
OF
LORD SWAMINARAYAN
1781-1981

THE CUP OF LOVE

(Fifty-four poems of Swaminarayan saint-poets.)

Versions

By

HARINDRA DAVE

With an Introduction

By

M. V. KAMATH

1981

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
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Dedicated
with love and obeisance
To
Shree H.H. PRAMUKH SWAMI
Whose divine inspiration made
possible this humble offering.

FOREWORD

The metaphysical poems written by the Swaminarayan saint-poets Muktanand, Premanand, Nishkulanand, Brahmanand, Devanand and Bhumanand contain a spontaneous blending of both subtle philosophy and deep mysticism. To bring them to the intellectual minds of the philosophers, we decided to get them translated into English. Shri Harindra Dave, the renowned Gujarati poet, undertook to translate some of the selected poems. And happily he has been able to bring the essence of the poems in his English renderings.

Again, merely the bare translation of the poems would not bring before the readers the subtlety of the subject. We then approached Shri M. V. Kamath, an eminent journalist and the editor of the renowned "The Illustrated Weekly" with a request to write a detailed Introduction on the subject, which he very readily accepted. The readers will find the Introduction amply vivid bringing out the comparison of the subject with Western and Indian poets, both medieval and modern.

We thank both the stalwarts for accomplishing the assignment.

Shree Akshar Purushottam Temple,
Ahmedabad.

30th March, 1981. H. T. DAVE

PREFACE

The few lyrics which follow were written in Gujarati by Swaminarayan saint-poets of early nineteenth century; their creativity flowered only by their spiritual experience.

In translating them into English for the benefit of those not knowing Gujarati, I have, as far as possible, avoided the temptation to transcreate. The task was undertaken as my humble offering on the occasion of the bicentenary of Shree Swaminarayan. Without the grace of Shree Maharaj and the blessings of H.H. Shree Pramukh Swami, I would not have been able to fulfil the task. It is God's work and God has taken care of it.

I am indebted to my friend Shri Madhav Kamath for taking deep interest in the project and also for writing the learned Introduction, which is an embellishment to the book. How can I forget the significant contributions of my friends Shri C. 'K. Venkataraman, Shri Homi Dastur and Shri Ghanshyam Desai? My elder brother, Shri H. T. Dave, helped me in understanding the philosophical implications of some of the lyrics.

When we attempt a version of a poem from one language to another, it is difficult to bring out the full meaning in all its nuances. I am sure these immortal poets, with their unfailing grace, will condone my shortcomings.

HARINDRA DAVE

LYRICS AND METAPHYSICAL POEMS OF EAST AND WEST

M. V. Kamath

In ancient Greece a lyric was originally a poem meant to be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre (hence the derivative), a stringed instrument rather like a small harp. Later the word was used for a poem with song-like qualities: short, usually divided into verses, and expressing the feelings of the poet. The lyric, as we know, flourished in England in the Elizabethan Age as witnessed by the lovely lyrics scattered throughout Shakespeare's plays. Neglected in the 18th century, it became popular again with the Romantic Poets of the 19th century. One may say that odes, elegies and sonnets are all species of lyrics.

The chief characteristic of a lyric is that it must reflect spontaneous, direct feeling. We speak of a *lyric outburst of song* and rightly so because another component of a lyric is that it should lend itself to singing. The style could be rapturous, effusive or undisciplined. The words must come with the spontaniety of the devotee addressing his Lord. A lyric can be composed but should not be contrived. Sant Tukaram's *abhangs* come under this category. So do the compositions of a large number of Indian saints from the north, south, east and west. We will come to a study of these subsequently. Most of these compositions address themselves to God under various names. Whether it is a composition by Thiagaraja, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Kabir or Nanak, the essence of their work is the establishment of a direct relationship between the poet-saint (or is it saint-poet?) and the god of his conception. It is possible that these saint-poets worked hard at their compositions. More likely these were divine gifts that came to their lips naturally. They are often effusive, always rapturous. And they have been sung, as they should be sung, with the same rapture that motivated the poet. We, to this day, sing the *bhajans* of Mira, as also the *kirtans* of Jayadeva or Chandidas. God-intoxicated they were, these poet-saints and their theme was very often Love. The philosophical content, if it existed in their compositions, was in a low-key. The concern was for one-ness with god and the means to attain it. How could one come to the Lord if obsessed with lust, greed, anger, passion or jealousy? Often the poet-saint asked his listener to abjure these in order to completely surrender himself (*sharanagati*) to the Lord's Lotus feet. The works of these Indian poet-saints, in this sense, differ to a large extent from those of the metaphysical poets of the west, like Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Cowley, Vaughan and Marvell. We will discuss them briefly before proceeding to the writings of our own composers.

There is some diversity of opinion as to who are the English metaphysical poets. In the 'School of Donne' are mentioned Cowley, Davenant, Drayton, Overbury, Randolph, Sir John Davies, Sir John Beaumont, Cartwright, Cleveland, Crashaw, Corbet and Lord Falkland. Dr. Johnson in his *Life of Cowley* says that "the metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their whole endeavour." Is that all there is to metaphysical poetry? Take Dryden's comment on Donne in *A Discourse concerning Satire*: "He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts and entertain them with the softness of love."

We have here two definitions of metaphysical poetry of those times: the showing off of learning and perplexing the mind 'with nice speculations of philosophy'. Dr. Johnson thought that while metaphysical poets "neither copied nature nor life, neither painted the forms of matter nor represented the operations of intellect", he conceded at the same time that they might be wits "for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts." Dr. Johnson defined wit "as a kind of *discordia concors;* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." The concept of metaphysics as Wit is somewhat quaint but evidently the English critics and essayists had no alien literature to help them define metaphysics in more precise terms. We see them struggling with the concept. Addison is another who takes a pot shot at defining the term. In his last *Spectator* paper on Wit he says: "In order therefore that the Resemblance in the Ideas be

Wit, it is necessary that the Ideas should not lie too near one another in the Nature of things; for where the Likeness is obvious, it gives no Surprise."

One reason for the critics' confusion as to what metaphysical poetry is surely was the very nature of that poetry as written in those times. Dr. Johnson thought the English metaphysical poets were "wits, rather than poets" and held that "their wit denies them emotional power and sublimity!" Mathew Arnold went a step further: "The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden, Pope and all their school is briefly this: their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul. The difference between the two kinds of poetry is immense."

In his *Study of Poetry,* Arnold went on to spell out the difference in a little greater detail. He spoke of the 'high seriousness' which separated emotional power and sublimity from the less serious products of the wits or a less intense criticism of life. We are entitled to be a little amused that one would think that something metaphysical could be 'less serious' than the intensity of emotional power. But such were the readings of those times.

Indeed there is no way of understanding the English concept of "metaphysical" except in terms of their own understanding of it. It has been said, for example, that 'metaphysical' is a subdepartment of 'baroque and therefore an aspect of an historical phenomenon observable throughout Europe.' But what is 'baroque'? The term was at first derisive, to denote a description of a period in art history, namely the one that followed the High Renaissance. The expression covered many different styles and manners. Thus the music of Bach, the poetry of Milton, the philosophy of Liebnitz have been called *baroque* which would surprise many considering that the standard dictionary meaning of the word is "artistically irregular, tastelessly odd, ornate, fantastic, grotesque", and who on earth would call Bach and Milton as 'grotesque' or 'tastelessly odd'? It is possible, of course, that the word got its derisive meaning because it was in some ways closely associated with Counter-Reformation and especially Jesuit, piety. However, it is equally possible that the word came to be associated with a change in the mood of literature between Elizabethan and Jacobean — the cult of abnormal subjects, of melancholy and what Frank Kermode has called 'a certain new gloom'. The English may have picked up this style from Marino, a great Italian poet, whose works had been translated into English and of which he himself said he hoped they'll please by the novelty and strangeness of the invention (*la novita e bizzarria della invenzione*) and by their wittily conceited manner (*la maniera del concettare spiritoso*).

We are now offered a new description of the 'metaphysical', namely 'conceit' which may be best described as 'a fanciful notion', 'witty thought or expression', 'a personal opinion' rather that in terms of the pejorative 'too high an opinion of oneself'. And if we remember that wit itself is "the power to perceive quickly and express cleverly ideas that are unusual, striking and amusing" we begin to get a better understanding of what the early English commentators had in mind in describing poets such as Donne as 'metaphysical'. Donne indeed could — and did — use ideas that were both 'unusual and striking'. Consider this:

> Be not concern'd; study not why, nor when;
> Doe not much as not believe a man.
> For though to erre, be worst, to try truths forth,
> Is far more businesse, than this world is worth.

The word *conceit, concetto* or *concepto* also meant 'metaphor' as well as 'conceit' in the sense in which Dr. Johnson used the word. In that sense we may think of the poetry of conceit as the poetry which discovers and expresses the universal analogies binding the universe together. In his excellent essay on Modern Theories of Metaphysical Poetry, Joseph Mazzeo says that in his opinion "the principle of universal analogy as a poetic, or the poetic of correspondences, offers a theory of metaphysical poetry which is simpler, in greater harmony with the evidence and freer from internal contradictions than the major theories that have yet been formulated." We may study how analogy or metaphor is used in the poetry of Donne, Herbert and their school of writers. Donne's famous line, *No man is an island, entire of* *itself* is a good example. Or take this:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest.
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.

Donne often addressed himself to God.

As due by many titles I resign
My self to thee, O God, first I was made
By thee, and for thee, and when I decayed
Thy blood bought that, the which before was mine.

Or again

As thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free
My soul: whoever gives, takes liberty:
O, if thou car'st not whom I love
Alas, thou lov'st not me.

Or yet again, in his *Hymn to God the Father*:

I have a sin of fear that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thy self that at my death, thy Sun
Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore,
And having done that, thou hast done,
I have no more.

Donne also wrote religious poetry and this is perhaps where he comes as close to Indian poet-saints as any English metaphysical poet has ever. Dr. Johnson is both harsh and understanding of the religious poetry of Donne. "Let no pious ear be offended," he wrote, "if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please.... Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer." To an Indian ear, accustomed to the poetry (lyrics) of Mira, Tulsidas or Surdas, this must sound like blasphemy and not just a literary offence. But then Donne was not Tulsidas and one misses in his poetry the sense of ecstasy that one associates with the work of the great Indian saint-poets. What comes as a surprise is that even a critic of our own times, T. S. Eliot, has suggested that religious poetry — that is, poetry whose subject is not the doctrines of religion, but man worshipping or man at prayer — gives a limited kind of pleasure. It is a sad commentary on the state of *English* religious poetry; he surely could not make such a sweeping generalisation on religious poetry in other languages.

Helen Gardner has an explanation. Donne, she says, "though in many other ways a remarkable human being, is not remarkable for any spiritual gifts and graces which we recognise at once as extraordinary and beyond the experience of the majority of mankind." And then: "For all his genius as a poet, his intellectual vivacity and his passionate and complex temperament, his religious experience seems, as with most of those who profess to call themselves Christians, to have been largely a matter of faith and moral effort. In his early poetry there is nothing to suggest a latent spirituality.... In his love poetry he is only rarely tender and almost never humble.... In his almost total blindness to the beauty of the natural world he reveals a lack of the receptivity, that capacity for disinterested joy, which is one of the marks of the spiritual man." It is very rarely that Donne rises to heights that the Indian saint-poets seem to do almost without trying as when he writes:

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free
Not ever chast, except you ravish mee.

In that sense, George Herbert whose name automatically is evoked when metaphysical poetry is discussed, seems different from Donne in his direct appeal to God.

In his 'dedication' to *The Temple,* Herbert thus addresses himself to God:

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine either: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.

Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

Herbert, like most of the men of the seventeenth century, did not believe that sorrow was totally banished or that man achieved continued beatitude on this earth. God had constantly to 'create':

Lord, mend or rather make us: one creation
Will not suffice our turn:
Except thou make us dayly, we shall spurn
Our own salvation.

Or again;

Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.
I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve:
And all my sowre-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.

We will quote just one more of the metaphysical poets before we go on to the Indian saint-poets. Henry Vaughan was deeply read in the Bible and as M. M. Mahood has remarked "probably there is no poet of the period whose work reveals a more intimate knowledge of the Bible." Vaughan, according to Mahood, "had a deeper and finer knowledge of them (scriptures) than even Bunyan attained." Vaughan was a mystic and comes as close to the Indian tradition as any English metaphysical poet has. But like all mystics he was dejected at his own powerlessness to experience union with God, or even illumination, except at the rarest intervals. It was as if, says Mahood, God had interposed a veil between Himself and the human mind which the poet could penetrate only in those visionary moments when

Some strange thoughts transcend our wonted theams
And into glory peep.

The image of the veil occurs frequently in Vaughan's writings:

Thou art my Sun, great God! O when shall I

View the full beams of thy meredian eye?
Draw, draw this fleshy curtain, that denies
The gracious presence of thy glorious eyes.

or

All other days, compar'd to thee.
Are but lights weak minority,
They are but veils, and Cypers drawn
Like clouds, before thy glorious dawn.

Or again,

Onely this Veyle which thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows thee from me.
This veyle thy full-eye'd love denies
And onely gleams and fractions spies.

Is Vaughan's subtle use of veil symbolistic rather than semantics? Does it owe much to the veil symbolism to be found in Hermetic and Neoplatonic writers, as Mahood suggests or to something borrowed, howsoever indirectly, from the wisdom of the east, and especially Indian? Mahood quotes Cornelius Agrippa whose plea "Cast off the veil before your faces" is quoted by Thomas Vaughan. The German mystics had a particular liking for the image. Could it be that the concept was borrowed from the *Ishopanishad* but has never been recognised as such? Was the *Ishopanishad* or some aspect of it known in Vaughan's England (1621-1695)? Take these lines from stanza 15 of the *Ishopanishad*:

> Hiranmayena patrena satyasyapihitam mukham,
> Tattvam pushann-apavrun satya-dharma drshtaye
>
> (The face of truth is covered with a golden veil. Uncover that reality, Pushan, to the glance of one devoted to Truth.)

Vaughan's frequent reference to the Sun (Thou art my Sun, great God! when shall I view the full beams of thy meredian eye?) can be compared to the 16th stanza of the *Ishopanishad*:

> Pushann-ekarshe yama surya prajapatya tyuha rashmint samuha tejo yat te

> Rupam kalyanatamam tat te pashyame, Yo'sav-asau purusha so'ham-asmi.
>
> (O Nourisher, one Rishi, Controller, Sun, Progenitor, gather your rays, restrain your splendour, so that I may see that aspect of yours which is most holy. The person who is called 'that', 'that' he I am.)

Was Vaughan, then, unknown to his critics and commentators, a student of Indian philosophy through secondary sources? We do not know. Symbolism is not unique to the Upanishads; the Sufis have used it and Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* is particularly redolent of it.

There was a Door to which I found no Key:
There was a Veil past which I could not see:
Some little Talk awhile of Me and Thee
There seem'd — and then no more of Thee and Me.

One may be stretching a point too much, but students of metaphysical poetry may note, with some interest, a certain similarity of style say, between Brahmanand of the *Uddhav Sampradaya* (whose poem *The Lord Said Lovingly* is reproduced later in the text) and George Herbert. The following lines are from Brahmanand:

Listen O dwellers of Vraj, to what I say,
I am telling you a truth deep from my heart
I will explain giving examples
The Lord said lovingly.
Such is my divine form
The Lord said lovingly.
As the birds soar in the sky
The Lord said lovingly.
Such birds are numberless in the sky
The Lord said lovingly.
Clouds, lightning and water
The Lord said lovingly.
All these forms are distinct and different,
The Lord said lovingly.
All settle into that void
The Lord said lovingly.

As the water settles in snow
The Lord said lovingly.
Feel that the sky is Akshar
The Lord said lovingly.
Think of Maya as total darkness
The Lord said lovingly.

And here are lines from George Herbert's *Heavens*

O who will show me those delights on high?
Echo I
Thou Echo, thou art mortal, all men know.
Echo No.
Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves?
Echo Leaves.
And are there any leaves, that still abide?
Echo Bide.
What leaves are they? Impart the matter wholly.
Echo Holy.
Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?
Echo Yes.
Then tell me, what is that supreme delight?
Echo Light.
Light to the minde: what shall the will enjoy?
Echo Joy.

II

Dr. Johnson made a remarkable statement that "contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical." If only he had Jayadeva's Gitagovinda, as a starter!

Jayadeva, wandering king of bards
Who sing at Padmavati's lotus feet,
Was obsessed in his heart
By rhythms of the goddess of speech,
And he made this lyrical poem
From tales of the passionate play
When Krishna loved Sri.

Jayadeva, according to both legends and documents, lived and composed in eastern India during the latter half of the twelfth century. This is about the time when the South Indian Vaishnava devotional cults had become active and influential in Orissa and Bengal. Traditional accounts have it that Ramanuja, the great Vedanta philosopher and apostle of the Srivaishnava cult, visited Puri in the early part of the twelfth century and established a school there. Jayadeva, too, reportedly visited Puri where he came under the influence of the Jagannatha cult and formed a special relationship with Padmavati. Whether Padmavati was his wife or whether this is a reference to Krishna's consort has never been cleared. According to Barbara Stoller Miller, the "marriage" of Jayadeva and Padmavati in the legend may be a veiled allusion to his initiation in the Srivaishnava cult that was established in Puri under Ramanuja's influence. In any event, the role of Krishna's cowherdess consort Radha in the Gitagovinda takes a cosmic significance in the context of recurrent references to Jagadisha — Lord of the world — who is Krishna.

Ms Miller calls Gitagovinda 'a dramatic lyrical poem'; Dr. Johnson might have seen in it 'wit' and 'conceit' though it must be obvious from the way Jayadeva integrates religious, erotic and aesthetic meaning in his lyrics that this was an inspired man, no ordinary word mechanic, as Donne and others have been frequently accused of. One notes in Jayadeva's lyrics rich metaphors as well.

Winds from sandalwood mountains
Blow now toward Himalayan peaks,
Longing to plunge in the snows
After weeks of writhing
In the hot bellies of ground snakes.

Metaphor, perhaps, is an inexact word to describe the wordplay in Jayadeva's lyrics. All Sanskrit poetry contains generous amounts of sound elaboration (*shabdalankara*) and Jayadeva's creation of what Ms Miller calls "a sensuous surface of a verbal ornamentation" is something special to him. There just is no comparable poet in the English language who could combine the erotic mood (*sringararasa*), a pervading emotion (*stahyibhava*) and devotional aesthetics (*bhaktirasa*).

If remembering Hari enriches your heart,
If his arts of seduction arouse you,
Listen to Jayadeva's speech . .
In these sweet soft lyrical songs.

Indeed songs they are. The first song is sung in raga 'Malava'; the second in raga 'Gurjari'; the third in raga 'Vasanta':

Gleaming saffron flower pistils are golden sceptres of Love.

Trumpet flowers like wanton bees are arrows in Love's quiver.

When spring's mood is rich, Hari roams here
A cruel time for deserted lovers.

The fourth song is sung in raga 'Ramakari', each evoking a mood. The eighth song, for example, is sung in raga 'Karnata', the ninth in raga 'Desakhya' and the tenth in raga 'Desavaradi'.

Another poet, who was a seer and a saint besides, is Vidyapati (1400 A.D. to 1507 A.D.). A Maithili brahmin by birth (the Bengalis frequently claim him as their own), his poems remind one of Jayadeva's own lyrics addressed to Krishna. Like Jayadeva, again, Vidyapati wrote *sringararasa kavya*:

Says Radha:

He who dwells in my heart, cannot remain far from me!
Just as the sun gives constant nourishment to the lotus.
With these words people try to console me.
Alas! words are but a sad palliative to me.
When formerly He would just withdraw His embrace,
That moment's loss in separation would torture me like fire
And the sandal paste on my body would be burnt by the fire of pain.

A contemporary of Vidyapati was Chandidas who has been described as the ideal Vaishnava poet of Bengal. Chandidas lived from 1417 to 1477 A.D. and like Jayadeva and Vidyapati wrote of Krishna. Bankey Behari has said that for cadence, imagery and richness of thought, Chandidas has no equal in Bengal. Vidyapati himself is reported on hearing of Chandidas to have travelled many miles on foot in order to meet and honour his great contemporary. Behari says that the music of Chandidas' poetry "when properly intoned sends a thrill through the listener." Here are a few lines from Chandidas:

Says Radha:

Shyama Sundar is my shelter
He is the essence of all.
That same Shyama is my life; he is my life-breath.
The garland round my neck is Shyama.
Shyama is the pearl hanging from my nose,
Shyama, the beautiful dress which I wear,
The blue-tinted sari I put on for Shyama.
Shyama has encompassed my body and soul,
A veritable *dasi* of His, I have become.
Shyama is my strength, Shyama is my witness,
Shyama, my riches and wealth.
It was my good fortune that the Creator gave me Shyama.

Chandidas was followed in Bengal by Chaitanya (1484 to 1532 A.D.), the Krishna *kirtan* evangelist par excellence. It is said that once he lay for eight hours, lost in ecstasy, unconscious and immobile, in union with the Lord at the great temple of Jagannath. Any words spoken about Krishna brought tears of love in his eyes. Says he in his memorable *Shikshatak*:

O Lord! I crave not for wealth
Or high relationships;
Nor is it my desire to be a poet,
O Shri Krishna!
I cherish but one desire,
To love you with single-hearted devotion
Through countless lives!
O darling of Nanda!
I, thy slave, am steeped
In the ocean of worldliness.
I pray Thee keep me
In Thy Lotus Feet
As a particle of dust
That I may thereby attain
The joy of my life!

The sixteenth century saw the flowering of some of the finest spiritual poets of India whether it was Mirabai (1547-1614 A.D.) or Tukaram in Maharashtra (1568 to 1650 A.D.) or Tulsidas (1511 to 1637 A.D.). Mira sang of Krishna, Tukaram of Vittal and Tulsidas of Rama. The theme, as ever, of course, is the love of god. There are few songs comparable to Mira's surrender to Krishna — her Giridhara Gopala — in the history of devotional songs as:

Merey tho Giridhara Gopala dusro na koyi,
Ja ke sira mora mukata mero pati soyi.

Her devotion to Krishna was total, as was her surrender to the Lord which defied all the norms of her times.

Mother! bestow on me my Giridhari
I want no ornaments, nor garments.
I crave not even for mansions.
Believe me, my troth, I say Giridhari is
Dearer to me than my life.
I have completely surrendered to Him.

When she was challenged, she sang:

Pul kato sahi in nainan ke Girdhari bina pal antniharen
Jibh katey na bhajey Nandnandan budhi katey Hari namabisarey
Mira kahey jar javo hiye pud kunj bina palantar dharey
Sis navey Brajraj bina wuh sishi kat kunwan kin darey.

(May these eye-lashes be torn, if they look even for a moment upon anyone besides Giridhar: may this tongue be cut to pieces if it recites not the name of Giridhar constantly, and farewell, O my intellect, if thou meditate not on Him. Burn this heart if it does not worship the Lotus Feet of the Lord always, and if ever this head should bow to one besides Brajraj cut it off and cast it into the well.)

It is this, surely, that made Hermann Goetz, the distinguished Indologist, to write: "And I, personally, know only one other similar person, Jesus, the Christ, shrouded in the presence of his Divine Father, as she in that of her Divine Husband, pure, loving, and misunderstood and misinterpreted like her."

It is impossible to write about Krishna *bhakthas* among poets without mentioning one other name, that of Surdas (1479 to 1584 A.D.). It is said that it was Sri Vallabhacharya who instructed him in the Radha-Krishna *lilas* but thereafter he only sang of Radha and Krishna. He was a contemporary of Mirabai and it is said that Akbar visited him as also Tansen. It is said that Akbar also paid a call on Mirabai disguised as a wandering mendicant, but there is no historical evidence to prove it. But it is quite possible that Akbar did visit Surdas in his native Brajdesh. The songs of Surdas are incorporated in that *magnum opus* of Vaishnava poetry — the Sur Sagar. Surdas reputedly wrote one hundred thousand songs which may be an exaggeration, but some eight thousand are still extant which will indicate that this was a prodigious composer. Did Mira ever call on Surdas? Did Surdas ever go to hear Mira's own compositions? It was the era of great poets. Even Todarmal, one of Akbar's *navaratnas* — Nine Jewels of the Court — wrote poetry, though his is secular poetry with none of the devotion that is so much a part of our saint-poets' compositions. What gives especial poignancy to the works of Surdas is that he was born blind. We do not know who, in the circumstances, recorded his verse, but it has that same tone of devotion, utter and total devotion, we see in Mira's immortal works.

Says Radha:
Uddhava! if this body should again be incarnate,
This I pray, that my mind should love none beside
Nandanandanan,
That of the skin of this body a drum should be made
so that when struck
I would melodiously utter Shyama, Shyama!
That of its veins, a stringed instrument be made,
So that at all hours it would reverberate with the
music of
Shyama Murari's name.
And that when this body is turned into dust, a creeper
with lovely flowers may appear out of it,
Which flowers when plucked by him
Would produce the sound 'Shyama, Shyama' at the
gardener's touch.

Or consider this:

> Day and night, tears rain from our eyes incessantly.
> Since Shyama left us, our eyes rain like the clouds in the rainy season.
> The adornment of the eyes is washed away and the cheeks are coloured black.
> Our garments are drenched and cannot be dried.
> Our body is wet — day and night.
> Surdas pleads to Thee, O Lord! save Braj from drowning in the sea of the agony of Thy separation.

With Tukaram, Maharashtra's sage, the lament, if so it can be called, is of a different nature. It often bears the stamp of agony of repentance, because, it is said, his early life 'had not been commendable'. Prof. Ranade in his *Mysticism in Maharashtra* writes:

> "There is a sort of Hegelian dialectic in Tukaram's soul. In the first stage of his career, he seems to have resolved to withdraw himself from the life of the world in a determined effort to win spiritual knowledge. This is the stage of positive affirmation. Then comes the stage of negation, the Dark Night of Tukaram's soul, a stage when Tukaram was warring with his own self. Finally, there is the stage of new affirmation, namely, the cancellation of the original determination and the middle negation in a final Vision of Godhead, which transcends them both."

Bankey Behari, in his study *Minstrels of God* calls Tukaram "a born saint, and had only to unfold his sainthood, although the covers which he had to remove were such that for a time it seemed as if he was of common origin." Tukaram was born a bastard in a Sudra family and bereavement dogged him at every step. It was only his life-long striving, ceaseless effort to curb his unruly and restless spirit that finally prevailed. His way to spiritual peace was through *bhakti marga;* he was a *dvaitist* often saying: "I do not want to identify myself with Thee. I only want to serve Thy feet....How shall the Impersonal please me Whose face I cannot see." Nevertheless, he wanted to see his God. He prayed for a personal revelation. "Be Formless as others desire, but for me take Thou a Form!"

There came a time when he felt the call to spread the gospel of love. Tradition has it that the Lord ordained that he should be a great singer. He chose the *abhanga* as the vehicle of his expression. He sang of Purandara Vittala, of Pandarinath, the darling of Nanda. His message was the message of the Name. He might have echoed the Gospel of John: "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God and what God was, the Word was." He prescribed it as the efficacious remedy for all ailments of the soul. Indeed, he maintained that the goal of life was to get the beatific vision (*sakshatkar*) of Sri Krishna.

> In the name of Sri Krishna dwells His form.
>
> The Supreme Being is incarnate as Sri Krishna.
>
> The name of Krishna is an invulnerable boat in which to cross the ocean of metampsychosis.
>
> Devakinandan Krishna, has captured my mind and I have verily become mad for Him, as a result of my contemplation of Him.
>
> Why waste your time idly wandering in the wilds of the Vedas thereby tiring yourselves?
>
> Go to the dwellings of the Gopis and you will find Krishna in love-bonds there.

Or

> Lord Vithal is everything to me.
>
> He is my sole relation — my Father, Mother, Brother, and Sister, my Vithal is all.
>
> What do I care for my caste?
>
> I care only for my Vithal.
>
> He pervades all the seven universes below and is omnipresent in all the seven Lokas above.
>
> He is the flower of my heart, is everything to me.

Tukaram was effective as a teacher precisely because he could not care very much for caste, or ritual. Rituals performed without their symbolism properly understood called for his condemnation. He taught internal purity and decried austerity for the sake of austerity. His *abhangs* indicate the intensity of his devotion. They are full of meaning. They are no ordinary lines written in a moment of idleness but rich songs written or spontaneously sung in the plenitude of his vision. To Tukaram, mystic experience was the hallmark of spirituality.

Take this *abhang*:

Thou hast taken the beautiful Form for us.
Should I play the ignorant one and seek to dissolve myself
in the Ocean of Non-Existence?
Oh! no, Lord, I seek not Nirvana,
I desire to enjoy the love and beauty of Thy face!

His plea to see the Lord face to face suffuses many of his *abhangs*:

I seek not Brahma-gyan, self-identity.
I will always desire dual consciousness,
Thou shalt ever remain my Lord and I Thy devotee.
I beg of Thee, O Charmer of Gopis' hearts!
Manifest Thyself before me, so that I may lay my head
at Thy feet!
I shall embrace Thee.
I shall look constantly upon Thy beautiful face and
apply all my art to save Thee from the effect of
evil omens.
In solitude I shall dwell and hold communion with Thee.
Knowing my heart, pray do not delay, but come and
meet me soon.
So says Tuka.

We may take one more sixteenth century poet-saint Tulsidas who sang not of Krishna, but of Rama.

He was so totally devoted to Rama that it is said that when he visited Brindaban and found in every temple that he visited only the form of Radhakrishna, he cried:

Ka barnon chabi aj ki bhaley baney ho Nath
Tulsi mastak tab navey dhanus ban leyo hath!

> (Lord Krishna, very beautiful art Thou with Thy flute and peacock plume, would that (to please me) Thou hadst instead the bow and arrow (symbolic of Rama).

Whereupon, it is said, his petition was accepted by the Lord and He immediately appeared as desired. The idol became Sri Sita Ram!

A couplet from one of Tulsidas' many songs bears witness to his intense devotion:

> Rama, the hero of the Raghus, walks with his friend by the river Sarayu.
>
> Tulsidas, in ecstasy, sees him, and takes the dust of his feet.

Tulsidas lived long — over a hundred and twenty five years! — and while he wrote extensively we know him chiefly through his *Ramacharitamanasa* though his *Kavitavali* is no less a work. Tulsidas also wrote the *Gitavali* which, as its name denotes, consists of songs set to music in different *ragas* and *raginis* — in *Lalita, Cancari, Soratha, Bhairavi, Vasanta, Dhanasri, Bilavala*. Tulsidas is pre-eminently a poet to be sung. True, he wrote the story of Rama, but intertwined in his story is a streak of metaphysics:

> Ignorant people do not understand their own delusion,
> And fools blame the Lord for their own false belief.
>
> Seeing a curtain of cloud in the sky,
> The ignorant say the cloud has covered the sun.
>
> Two moons will appear to him
> Who looks with a finger across his eyes.
>
> As darkness, smoke and dust hide the sky.
>
> O Uma, so is the delusion concerning Rama.
>
> Objects, senses, the gods of the senses, the embodied soul,
> Each is illumined by the help of the other.

The question arises: where would the objects be if there were no senses to contact them? What function, as Chandra Kumari Handoo asks in her excellent study of Tulsidas, would the senses perform if they were not illumined by consciousness, and if the soul did not inhabit the body, where would consciousness, the essence of life, come from?

Tulsidas answers:

> But he who gives light to them all
> Is Rama, the Unborn, the king of Ayodhya.
>
> The world is illumined by the light of Rama.
>
> The lord of *maya,* the abode of virtue and knowledge is He.
>
> Through His reality, lifeless *maya*
> Shines like the real through the help of delusion.
>
> As the open shell gives the idea of silver
> And the sun's rays, of water,
> Knowing this to be false all the time,
> We are unable to give up this delusion.
>
> In this way the world depends on God.
>
> Though unreal it gives us sorrow.
>
> If we are beheaded in a dream,
> Unless we awake, the unhappiness (of dying) will not cease.
>
> He through whose grace this delusion is destroyed,
> O Girija, He is Rama, the compassionate.
>
> No one has found his origin and end
> But the Vedas make inferences according to their understanding.

Deep as Tulsidas' devotion was to Rama, a distinguishing feature of *Manasa* is its many hymns depicting various devotional moods and different aspects of the Supreme Godhead. Ideas which are contradictory according to human conceptual thought — the *dwandas* or the pair of opposites famous in Sanskrit literature (which Dr. Johnson would have identified as the *discordia concors,* a combination of dissimilar images) are resolved in the wonderful unity of the All-encompassing *Brahman.* Take some of the *Rudrastaka,* or the eight-stanza hymn to Siva, for instance:

> I salute Thee, Lord Isana,
> Personification of *nirvana;*

Omnipresent and All-pervading,
Embodiment of the Eternal being
And the *Vedas*.

Established in Thine own Self,
Undifferentiated and attributeless
Thou who livest in the external sky
And also dwellest in the inner heaven
Of consciousness,
O desireless One, I worship Thee.

Formless and the seed of *Om*
Beyond waking, dreaming and the dreamless stage
Where speech, intellect and senses have no sway.

Lord of the mountains,
Terrible and kind!

Great slayer of death!

Repository of virtue,
I bow to Thee.

Like Tukaram, Tulsidas also believed in the power of the Name. When a devotee asked him what was the surest and swiftest way to realization, his answer was quick and to the point:

> Svapney tatha sambhranta prmadadi vijrambhanat
> sanskhlasad bhavat
> Rameti nametismratassakritvanasyatsangh dwij dhenu
> hatya.
>
> (Very great is the power of the Name of the Lord — even when uttered in dream, or while yawning unawares; it will counteract such great sins as the killing of hundreds of cows and even of Brahmin.)

And in the Dohavali he said:

If you wish to have inner and outer illumination,
Keep the jewel lamp of the name of Rama
On the threshold of your tongue,
Says Tulasi.

And

Distasteful is meditation on the Qualified God,
The Unqualified is also far from the mind,

"Then" says Tulasi, "remember
The life-giving name of Rama."

Tulsidas was as much a philosopher, as he was a poet and a saint. He knew that the basic reality underlying the universe with its myriads of created beings was the Unqualified God or the *Nirguna Brahman*. But *Nirguna Brahman* was only to be experienced in the superconscious state of *samadhi*. The *Saguna Brahman*, however, lay within the range of conceptual thought and therefore served as a bridge to the knowledge of the Formless and the Nameless One. Wrote Tulsidas:

He is my teacher, says Tulasi,
Who can explain:
The Unqualified without the Qualified
Or knowledge without ignorance
And light without darkness.
The *Nirguna* is like numbers,
The *Saguna* is like words.
Tulasi says: Understand both;
Then reject or accept.

Before we go over to another poet, Narsi Mehta, we may quote a few lines from Tulsidas' *Vinaya Patrika* which, for devotional fervour, remind us of all other saints. The following song (sung in *Raga Todi*) is an example of that fervour:

O Lord, Thou art compassionate and I am lowly,
Thou art generous and I am a beggar;
I am a known sinner and Thou the remover of
accumulated sins.
Thou art the Lord of the destitute,
But who is more destitute than I?
No one is more miserable than I
Nor is there a destroyer of miseries like Thee.
Thou art *Brahman* and I am *jiva* (creature);
Thou art master and I Thy servant.
Father, mother, teacher and friend art Thou.
Thou lookest after my welfare in every respect.
Many ties exist between me and Thee;
Accept whichever Thou carest for;

But, O kind One, however it may be,
Let Tulasi find the shelter of Thy feet.

Narsi Mehta (1414-1481 A.D.) was the precursor of other Vaishnavite saints in Gujarat, including Mirabai. His, too, was the path of devotion, *bhakti*. Indeed, as a pioneer and contributor to Gujarati literature, only Mirabai comes near to him. Narsi was the greatest *kirtankar* of his age and his emphasis on ethics as much on devotion marks him out as a saint-philosopher. One of his better known poems *Vaishnava jana tho tene* — he is the true Vaishnav — was a great favourite of Mahatma Gandhi:

He is a Vaishnava who feels for the suffering of another
And forgets the good he does to another, never taking
pride in it.
Who cares not for the praise and condemnation of the
world nor himself indulges in it.
He is not attached to women and wealth; such a one is
praiseworthy and a jewel to his family.
He is the same to all, is desireless and the women of
others he considers like unto his mother.
He never speaks falsehoods nor has he his eye on
another man's wealth.
He is no slave of any passion or attachment, and the
spirit of renunciation rules his mind.
His heart is fixed on the Lord, whom he is restless to
meet, really his body is indeed a pilgrim's garb.
He is neither avaricious, nor vile nor a victim to wrath
and desire.
Says Narsi, verily he and his family shall cross the cycle
of rebirth.

III

Kabir and Nanak belong to the same genre of poet-saints whose intensity of feelings mark them as the beloved of God. Of the two, Kabir was born earlier (1398-1527 A.D.) and lived longer. Nanak was born in 1469 when Kabir was already 71 years old and died in 1538 aged 69. Kabir was born to unknown parents and was found by a childless Muslim weaver on a lotus leaf in a neglected tank. Pleased by his find, the weaver took the foundling to his wife and adopted the child who was named Kabir (the Great). Kabir belonged to no religion. His guru was Ramanand and he worshipped the Impersonal Aspect (*Nirguna*) of the Lord. He ridiculed the theologians and exhorted people to give up rituals and ceremonials. He had no use for caste:

> Jati pati puchai na koi
> Hari ko bhaje so Hari ka hoi.
> (None shall inquire into thy caste. He who shall recite the Name of the Lord will be claimed by Him.)

There is a strong Sufi strain in his poetry, often reminiscent of Omar Khayyam:

> Saith the clay to the potter: To what purpose does thou knead me?
> Such a day shall come when I shall knead thee.

Do these lines remind one of Omar Khayyam who wrote:

> I watched the potter thumping his wet clay:
> And with its all-obliterated tongue
> It murmured, gently, brother, gently, pray.

When he fell ill, he refused to have himself treated, for who could treat a patient like him? Bidding farewell to the attending physician, he said:

> Depart to thy house, O physician, my malady is beyond thee
> He who has this pain created, He would look to my well-being.

It reminds one of the dervish (the Sufi mendicant) who fell into the river Tigris. Seeing that he could not swim, a man on the brink called out: "Shall I call on someone to help you?"

"No," said the dervish.

"Then do you wish to be drowned?"

"No."

"What then, do you wish?"

The dervish replied: "God's will be done. What have I to do with wishing?"

Kabir did not believe in austerities and remained a householder for a long time and followed his father's profession of a weaver. His *sakhis* and songs are full of mysticism:

I am intoxicated with love: why should I be conscious
of forms?

I crave freedom from this world, what attachment have
I to the world?

They who are separated from their Beloved wander
aimlessly from door to door:

My friend dwells within me, there is no waiting for me
any more!

The entire creation doth crackle much of its head for
Fame.

For me, the Name of my Lord is True: what attachment
have I to the world?

Not for a moment the Beloved forsakes me: nor I can
leave the Dear one.

I am in love with Him: there is no restlessness for me.

Intoxicated with love, dispel the duality from thy heart.

Delicate is the path thou hast to tread; why carry
a heavy burden on the head?

So says Kabir.

Or take this example:

Then shalt thou enjoy the taste of a cruise in the Ocean
of Happiness,

When consciousness of the harbour of desires is lost.

As within the seed the whole tree is packed,
So within desire all diseases are held.

In stubborn renunciation let thy mind be concentrated
and ye set fire to the harbour of desire;

In this way lies release.

Engrossed in the Essence, move about thy Work.

So says Kabir.

He said much the same in another verse:

> The name of God is the seed of all charms;
> That single root entirely disarms
> All loads of sin. He who that charm doth keep
> Will cross the sea of pain however deep.

Kabir sometimes speaks as a man, sometimes as a woman.

> This woman weaves threads that are subtle,
> And the intensity of her praise makes them fine.
> Kabir says: I am that woman,
> I am weaving the linen of night and day.
> When my lover comes and I feel his feet
> The gift I will have for him is tears.

And again, in this verse:

> My body and my mind are in a depression because you are not with me.
> How much I love you and want you in my house!
> When I hear people describe me as your bride I look sideways ashamed,
> Because I know that far inside us we have never met.
> Then what is this love of mine?
> I don't really care about food, I don't really care about sleep
> I am restless indoors and outdoors.
> The bride wants her lover as much as a thirsty man wants water.
> And how will I find someone who will take a message to the Guest from me?
> How restless Kabir is all the time!
> How much he wants to see the Guest!

No wonder that Kabir said 'in whose heart dwelleth the Lord performeth the best worship." It took some courage to speak out against ritualism etc. in the very heart of brahminism — Banaras, where he lived. Kabir insisted on a logical approach to religion, not just in giving charity.

> Give not your alms to him in charity
> Whom men call Brahmin, but who rogue may be;

The fellow goes with all possessed to hell
And takes with him the laymen blind as well.

My mind remembers Ram and Ram alone;
In Ram it groweth as it ne'er hath grown;
When mind hath been a second Deity,
Whom shall I bow to in humility.

Kabir believed in the liberating influence of a guru, but a true guru, tested first:

Consider that moment as most benign,
When on thee doth the light of guru shine;
For, then thy lips the name of Truth will say
Which all thy life will cure by its bright ray.
The Guru is the form of God in life;
O hear him, and thus end thy inner strife.
He is a ladder unto *swarg* to go;
Oh, hear him and thus end thy primal woe.

Of Nanak a story is told that tells all about him. As a pilgrim, he had gone to Mecca to pray. While other pilgrims left he stayed alone but soon, feeling tired, he fell asleep and unknowingly turned his feet toward the Kaaba. An Arab devotee, noting it kicked him for that sacrilegious act saying: "Who art thou, sleeping infidel? Why hast thou, O sinner, turned thy feet toward God?" To which Nanak, perfectly calm, is supposed to have replied: "Turn, O faithful one, these feet in the direction in which He is not!" Tradition has assigned a miracle on that occasion.

Years earlier, he had similarly ticked off the brahmins of Hardwar for offering oblations to the dead. Watching pilgrims offering oblations to the manes with water from the Ganga, their faces turned toward the East he wanted to know what they were doing. He was told that they were satisfying the thirst of their dead ancestors in another world. Whereupon Nanak also started offering what looked like oblations to his ancestors but turning westward. The enraged priest asked him what he meant to do by that unholy act. Replied Nanak: "My fields are situated in the Punjab in that direction and it is hot season, my fields must be parched, I am trying to water them." The priest said:

"Fool! how can fields far away be watered by sprinkling water here?" To which Nanak retorted: "Greater fools are you who think that by offering water oblations here, you can satisfy your dead ancestors in that other world!" Nanak was a revolutionary for his times. He had no use for formalities and rituals. He did not see people as Hindus or Muslims. On one occasion he defined a Muslim as one who had effaced his ego completely. When he was once asked what religion he professed, he said:

> Religion consisteth not in a patched coat,
> or in yogi's staff or in smearing ashes over the body.
> Religion consisteth not in the earrings being worn,
> or in shaven head, or in the blowing of horns.
> Religion consisteth not in mere words.
> Religion consisteth not in visiting the tombs or places
>   of cremation
> or in sitting in attitudes of contemplation.
> Religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries,
> or in bathing at places of pilgrimages,
> Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world
> Thou shalt then find the way to religion.

Nanak composed songs; they are full of devotion. They speak of a man who made humility a way of life. Like other poet-saints before him and after, he was in love with the Lord. Sometimes he described himself as the "handmaiden" of his Lord. "O Lord! I cannot live away in separation from Thee any longer," was his constant refrain. "Dwell within yourself," he advised his listeners and followers. He stressed the necessity of a guru. "The guru confers the Name. Without the Name one remains a beggar," he would tell those who would listen to him. He was opposed to austerities but warned his devotees against sensuality.

> I am a handmaiden of my Lord.
> By killing my ego I have gained my Lord.
> My Lord is the light Effulgent,
> This Mohan has captivated my heart and His name
>   is worth more than all knowledge for me.
> Who is a slave to the sensualities is false to himself

and suffers much agony.
He who is dyed in His dye is singing His name Rama
with joy all day and night.
I discarded the ego and true renunciation wooed me.
I bade goodbye to the world's ceremonials
and was lost in contemplation of Him.
Time now does not exist for me. I have transcended it.
I am wooed by my Lord. He is my beloved and in
His name
I always revel.
So says Nanak.

For anything comparable to the poetry of Nanak or Kabir we have to look not into compilations of English poetry but into Church hymnals or the Psalms, and the Bible. Take Job, 8:

Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?
Can reeds flourish where there is no water?
While yet in flower and not cut down,
They wither before any other plant.
Such are the paths of all who forget God.

The Psalms are incomparable. And anything that can be said of them can only diminish them. As Robert Bly has wisely said in his perceptive *The Kabir Book*, "there is very little that one can say of the bhakthi tradition that doesn't diminish it." And the Psalms are right in the bhakthi tradition and are to be sung. The directions are clear: "To the choirmaster, with stringed instruments" or "To the choirmaster, for the flutes." The complaint of the psalmist is the eternal complaint of all *bhakthas*:

How long, O Lord? Wilt thou forget me for ever?
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

Indeed many of the Psalms and the sayings of Indian saint-poets are almost interchangeable. They are the outpourings of a soul that thirsts for the Divine Presence, that delights as much in lamentation as in the satisfaction and the knowledge that Faith is its own reward and that the good Lord will not let his devotee down. Take Psalm 23 — a psalm of David:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters
he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.

This is music for saints as well as sinners and well it should be. It is what Leibnitz called the *philosophia perennis* — the Perennial Philosophy and what Aldous Huxley in the book of compilations under that name said: "The metaphysic that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendant Ground of all being — the thing is immemorial and universal." To limit it to any one time and place, to any one set of poets or writers is to narrow down our own understanding and definition of metaphysic. Rudiments of metaphysical poetry may be found as much among the traditional lore of peoples in every region of the world as among the most sophisticated poets. In a very real sense Milton is a metaphysical poet; so is Dante. So are a large number of poets from Shakespeare to Unamuno, the latter who noted in his *Rosario de Sonetos Liricos*:

Sufro yo a tu costa
Dios no existiente, pues si tu existieras
existieria yo tambien de veras
Thou art the cause of my suffering
Oh non-existing god,

for if thou didst exist
Then should I also exist.

We forget St. Francis of Assisi, forerunner of Dante, who revelled in the name of God. The beauty of his *Cantico di Frate Sole* (Canticle of Brother Sun) commonly known in English as *The Song of the Creatures* is a hymn of praise that echoes down the corridors of time:

Altissimo omnipotente bon Signore
tue so le laudi li gloria e l'onore e onne benedizione. . . .
Most high and most holy, most powerful Lord,
Whom with honour and blessing and praise we acclaim,
No man can be worthy to utter the word,
The Name of thy Name!

And if this does not ring a bell, does this?

Dulcis Jesu memoria
dans vera cordi gaudia:
sed super mel et omnia
ejus dulcis praesentia
Sweet is the memory of Jesus, giving true joy to the heart;
but sweeter beyond honey and all else is his presence.

What does it matter what the name is? Krishna, Rama, Allah, Jesus, it is in the merging of the individual with the Name, in the end, that is important and relevant. Ask Jalaluddin Rumi; or John of the Cross. Their answers, as always, will be the same.

IV

The lyrics that form the main body of this book are by a group of disciples of Shree Swaminarayan, one of the early architects of the development of an Indian religious renaissance.

Shree Swaminarayan (1781-1830) was born at Capaiya, near Ayodhya, grew up in the religious atmosphere of that ancient city and studied under his father, Guru Dharmadev. Following the demise of his parents, Ghanasyam, as he was first known as a child, gave up worldly life and soon became known as Nilakanta, because of his austere habits, his renunciation and his great knowledge of *Bhagavata Dharma*. He travelled widely throughout India and ultimately settled in Gujarat where he was accepted as a disciple by the great Guru Ramananda. Ramananda was quick to realise Nilakanta's spiritual attainments and persuaded his other disciples, including Muktanand, to accept Nilakanta as the head of the Order which he had established. It was Ramananda who gave Nilakanta *vaisnavi diksa* (initiation) and baptised him as Swami Sahajananda.

"Sahajananda was a lover of music," says H. T. Dave, his biographer, "not simply because of its rhythm and sound, but because it helped to invoke God." Sahajananda believed music has to be played to propitiate God, to know him esoterically and to blend one's life to living only in God. His *Paramahamsas,* notably, Muktananda, Devananda, Premananda and Brahmananda were great artists and possessed musical talents. Premananda, it is said, would start the *alaap* (the opening exposition) while others played musical instruments in accompaniment. It was Sahajananda who established the custom of holding congregations of devotees at fixed intervals at the temples built for Him. It was at these temples that the compositions of his *Paramahamsas* were sung.

The seniormost of these *Paramahamsas* was Muktananda who was originally the principal disciple of Ramananda Swami, the founder of the Uddhav Sampradaya, to be known later as the Swaminarayan Fellowship. Muktananda was born in 1758 in a village near Amreli in Saurashtra and was brought up in the ashram of Mahatma Mooldas, then a leading saint. He was compelled to marry at an early age but it was not long after that he forsook his bride in his search for the ultimate guru. Him he found in Ramananda who gave him the name of Muktananda. Muktananda soon became the head of all Ramananda's disciples.

It was not long afterwards that Ramananda met the youthful yogi, Nilakanta and it was clear to Ramananda that not Muktananda but Nilakanta sould be his choice as his successor. It is to the credit of Muktananda that he not only appreciated his guru's *raison d'etre* but went along with it, despite some preliminary doubts, only natural in the circumstances.

Sahajananda was equally understanding of Muktananda's qualities. Apart from being a highly spiritually evolved individual, Muktananda wrote poetry and was very knowledgeable in music and classical dance. In his lyrics we find glorification of Sri Krishna, but he was convinced that Swaminarayan, as Sahajananda was known, was Krishna incarnated. Indeed such was his conviction that Swaminarayan was the ultimate Purushottam that his compositions concentrated on Swaminarayan's profound glory.

Muktananda's care for those in the Fellowship was as tender as that of a mother. His saintliness was such that Swaminarayan was happy to place many of his disciples under Muktananda's care and attention. It was Muktananda who suggested that Swaminarayan should build temples and put the Fellowship on a sound footing for future generations.

In addition to his regular work which was overwhelming enough, Muktananda wrote commentaries on Brahma Sutras, on the tenth *skandh* of *Srimad Bhagavat* and other Sanskrit works. He was entrusted by Swaminarayan to write on the history and work of the Fellowship which he did till the last minute of his life. His work entitled *Dharmakhyan* narrates the life of Swaminarayan. He was one of the chief editors of *Vachanamritam*. Muktananda's Hindi compositions are simple, lucid and profound.

Brahmananda was known in his pre-initiation life as Ladudanji Barot (bard). He was born on February 8, 1772 at Sirohi, in Rajasthan. His father, Shambhudanji, was the chief poet in the court of the Maharaja of Sirohi.

Ladudanji himself showed his mettle at an early age and so impressed was the then Sirohi Maharaja that Ladudanji was sent to Bhuj (Kutch) to study further in the Lakhpat Vraj Bhasha Pathshala, an institution unique of its kind. He was then 18.

At Bhuj, Ladudanji studied under the Kutch Court's chief poet, Rajy Kavi Abhaydanji. He was quick to master compositions in several languages — Rajasthani, Kutchi, Hindi and Vraj but he specialised in bard songs in his own mother tongue.

He also took time to study Sanskrit and music under Shri Vijay Kushalji, the chief of the musical school patronised by the Maharao of Kutch. Then, while returning to his home back in Rajasthan, he undertook a tour of Gujarat and was warmly welcomed by the Maharajas of Dhrangadhra, Malia, Morvi, Junagadh and Bhavnagar. It was at the suggestion of Shri Vakhatsinhji, Maharaja of Bhavnagar, that he went to Gadhpur, the seat of Swaminarayan, reportedly to challenge his Godship. He went to scoff, as the saying goes, but remained to pray. Swaminarayan so charmed him that Ladudanji decided to become a sadhu and take *'diksha'* (initiation) from his new-found guru. He took the name of Brahmananda.

So deeply attached did he become to Swaminarayan that he composed poems celebrating his divinity. Brahmananda has written *udayragas* (to be sung in the early morning) and songs for various festivals and verses praising Siva, Ganesh and Krishna.

Brahmananda was also an architect and designed the temples at Vadtal, Junagadh, Muli and other places. He attained samadhi two years to the day after Swaminarayan attained *akshardam.*

About Premanand (whose compositions are included in this anthology) Dr. K. M. Munshi in his book *Madhyakalna Sahitya Pravaha* has said that he is one of the greats in devotional literature. Premanand stands on par with Narsi Mehta in the portrayal of pure devotion.

Premanand came from a lower caste but Swaminarayan had no difficulty in recognising in him a *Paramahamsa.* Premanand's fervour while singing was such that it is said that Swaminarayan said: "I would like to prostrate before this sadhu because of the intensity of his devotion."

He was a prodigious writer and legend has it that he had composed some 20,000 songs in Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Kutchi and Marwari. His poems reflected his love for his Lord Swaminarayan — but equally he wrote of Krishna addressing Him as his loving companion — *Premsakhi.* This was how he often signed off many of his poems.

Legend has it that his devotion was so moving that oftentimes God appeared before him with flower garlands. Swaminarayan would often go to hear Premanand sing on the bank of a river unbeknownest to his disciple.

Premanand was born in 1784 and came in contact with Swaminarayan in 1815. There is dispute about his origins. One story has it that he was born of Brahmin parents but was abandoned and brought up by a low-caste couple. Another has it that he was abandoned anyway and was picked up by nomads amidst whom he grew up. He is believed to have come in touch with one Swami Jnandasji, a disciple of Swaminarayan, who apparently took him to Gadhpur and to Swaminarayan.

It was recognition at first sight. Premanand threw himself at the feet of the Master who immediately accepted him and gave him his name. Nishkulanand was a carpenter's son and was born at Shekhpat, a village near Jamnagar. His father was a disciple of Ramanand and undoubtedly the son took after his father in his sense of dedication. He was married when he was invited by Swaminarayan to accompany him on a tour of Kutch. It is said that when they were approaching the village where Nishkulanand's parents-in-law lived, Swaminarayan initiated the young man in his Fellowship and asked his new disciple to go for *bhiksha* (alms) at his in-law's home. Nishkulanand's mother-in-law and wife were understandably stunned to see him in his ochre garb and implored him to revert to his householder's status. But Nishkulanand had made up his mind: "To *atman,*" he replied gently, "there is no house or relations. If you desire emancipation from the bondage of the world, worship Swaminarayan."

Nishkulanand believed that he was Bharat in his previous birth, compelled to take births because of his unmanifested attachment to the world. He was known as the personified form of 'vairagya' — renunciation — yet his compositions vividly describe the love for God in terms of the amorous feeling of a wife for her husband. Nishkulanand wrote some 20 books, some in Gujarati and some in Vraj. His poems are conspicuous for their description of the mythical nature of the world. But he dealt with not only *vairagya* but touched *shringara* (amorous), *veera* (valour) and *karunya* (tragedy). Nishkulanand was a master craftsman and his carvings adorn many of the old temples. It is said that he built a swing with twelve doors for Swaminarayan to be seated and be seen in twelve forms, one at each door, during one of the festivals. The swing has been preserved intact as a masterpiece of carving.

Nishkulanand was appointed the pontifical head of the Dholera Temple where he lived until his death.

Devanand was born Devidan Gandhavi in 1803 in village Barol, near Dholka in Saurashtra, in a bard family. From his childhood he showed an inclination to the mystic experience and legend says that Shiva once appeared before him and granted him a boon. 'Lord,' replied Devidan, "grant that I be liberated from the clutches of this world, so I could serve your lotus feet."

Shiva assured him that God had come as an incarnation in the person of Swaminarayan on earth and that surely he would see him in his own village. And so it happened. Swaminarayan visited Barol "to fetch you" as he told Devidan. Swaminarayan gave him *'diksha'*, named him Devanand and placed him in the charge of Brahmanand under whom he took lessons in music and poetic composition. Devanand in due course became a distinguished sitarist and maestro in *tabla* playing, astounding the Baroda Court and the Dharampur State Durbar with the vigour and purity of his playing.

Devanand composed his songs in various *ragas — Paraj, Malhar, Khamaj, Kafi, Desh, Sorath, Dhanashri, Kalyan, Bihag etc.* Like his *gurubhais* (fellow disciples) he sang of Swaminarayan as of Radha and Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva and Parvati, Ganesh and Surya.

After Brahmanand, he was appointed the pontifical head of the temple at Muli, where he served till his death.

V

The lyrics that appear in the following pages are a selection from the works of these great *Paramahamsas*. They have been painstakingly translated by Harindra Dave, himself a poet of outstanding merit, who was the recipient of a National Award. To the Gujarati reading public Dave needs no introduction. As poet, editor, literary critic, he has already made his mark and the award given him is merely an acknowledgement of his stature. His task was to preserve the flavour of the original lyrics written in Gujarati and in this he has succeeded to a remarkable degree. The English translations are presented here for the first time and one hopes that they will be accepted by a discerning public with that same enthusiasm in which the work was undertaken.

Dave's problem was to present as close a translation of the poems as was feasible, and to keep to the original metre. Even more importantly, his aim was to bring to the reader the full flavour of the original, which is rich in imagery. It would have been a violation of the spirit of the compositions if Dave had deviated from the existing form. He has wisely resisted the temptation. What we have, in the circumstances, is an approximation of the compositions in Gujarati. Thus:

He drinks the cup of love, He, the Seer.
He is entranced with the wine divine:
He is elated with the blissful rapture, He, the Seer.

The lyrics of the Swaminarayan poets will probably be best appreciated if they are read in the context of the times they lived in. We will take for a time-frame the hundred years between 1750 and 1850. Aurangzeb is dead. The Moghul Empire is in a state of chaos. Aurangzeb's three sons had fought a war of succession in which Azam and Kam Baksh had been killed; the brief rule of the victor, Muazzam, had been followed by what Waldemar Hansen has called "a ghoulish spate of puppet kings and assassinations." Nadir Shah had sacked Delhi in 1739 and taken away the Peacock Throne itself. Provinces had seceded and Sikhs, Rajputs and Jats were in open revolt.

Just fifty-three years after Aurangzeb's death, Imperial Delhi had been reduced to a phantom capital. In the twilight of the Moghul Empire, there was little for people to hold on to. Hinduism had been under siege. In one last spasm, the Marathas had fought a bloody war on the Plain of Panipat and lost. But a triumphant Muslim coalition had neither the will nor the desire to take up the reins of power. It just broke down as unpaid soldiers returned home, leaving an absent Moghul emperor with a crown that nobody wanted.

India had exhausted itself: militarily, administratively, emotionally and spiritually. And yet there still was some life in the country that, for all its exhaustion, refused to lie down and die. The chaos and confusion concomitant to an empire disintegrating had left the vast majority of the people — especially Hindus — leaderless. And now, over the horizon, a new force, till then unassessed, was rising. The British were settling down to the process of becoming masters of the land.

Now there was a fresh spate of wars. In the north Ranjit Singh, who had come to power in 1792 was dead by 1839 and the powerful kingdom he built was on the verge of being taken over. In the south, Tipu Sultan had been vanquished at the historic Battle of Srirangapattanam in 1799. The final wars between the British and the Marathas had sealed the fate of an independent Hindu India. By 1819 it was all but over. It took only one more generation for the British finally to be the total masters of India.

In 1803 Shah Alam, last of the Moghul 'Emperors' had been reduced to the state of a nonentity. His domains had shrunk to the point when it was being said:

From Delhi to Palam
Is the realm of Shah Alam.

In 1824, the Bishop of Calcutta, Reginald Heber, was received by the Moghul Emperor at Delhi. Heber found himself beseiged by "... a swarm of miserable beggars, the wives and children of the stable servants." The palace complex was "full of ... broken palanquins... and throne so covered with pigeons' dung that its ornaments were hardly discernible." Contemplating the desolation around him, Heber sombrely remembered that all was indeed vanity of vanities: "The spider hangs her tapestry in the palace of the Caesars."

In such a situation people had little to cling to but religion; kings and nabobs had been swept away and the new rulers from far away had still to consolidate their presence and power. They were newcomers and had nothing in common with the people.

Besides, they were ignorant of the customs and manners of the land and loth to interfere with existing laws. Lacking detailed knowledge of the Moghul system and without sufficient experienced personnel, the British in 1793 had even decided to recognise the old Moghul tax farmers and district revenue officers as the actual owners of the soil in Bengal and to fix their taxes in perpetuity.

India, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, thus exhibited a scene of leaderlessness and chaos during which it was only natural that the beseiged Hindus should look for a *spiritual* leader since politics had run its course and political leadership was not open to Indian citizens, except in terms of leading armies. But with the defeat of all the then kingdoms and the desolation of the land and the cracking of the economic system, there was only one venue open to Hindus: the realm of the spirit.

If this thesis is accepted, we can understand both the strength of the new sects that were being spewn and the devotion with which leaders of these *Panths* were deified.

In his perceptive work *Life and Philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan,* H. T. Dave sums up the situation beautifully.

> "During the latter part of the eighteenth century, India was ruptured and divided. The political, social and religious ties were loosened. The rise of perverse religion of the Vama Marga and the Sakta Cult led to deterioration in ethical and social values. Degeneration and decay undermined the morality of the country to such an extent that people in general became addicted to wine and meat. Adultery became rampant. Vedas were misinterpreted so as to justify the performance of himsamaya Yajnas (cruel sacrifices). People had abandoned every ethical code to indulge in voluptuous pleasures, arising from wine, women and wealth. Social and religious structure had largely crumbled. Internal warfare had disrupted society and lawlessness prevailed. Against this background Swami Sahajanand or Lord Swaminarayan took birth at Capaiya, near Ayodhya, in order to resuscitate the religious and ethical values."

It is a universal law of life that leaders among men are born in a society that is at the end of its tether. So it was with Napoleon and before him of Joan of Arc. So it was with a Hitler, a Lenin and a Gandhi, a Roosevelt or a Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Gita put it succinctly when it said:

> Paritranaya sadhunam, vinashayacha dushkritam
> dharma samsthapanarthaya
> sambhavami yuge yuge.

Sahajanand, undoubtedly, was the man of the hour. He was born in the right place and the right time. It may not be very germane to the quality of life that he led that he preferred the Ramanuja creed of *visishtadvaita*. The more important thing to remember about him is that like Buddha before him, he practised austerities. He travelled barefoot in the valleys of the Himalayas, in the jungles and to many holy places observing life. Says Dave, his biographer:

> During these travels, he saw the great discrepancy in the life and preachings of many sadhus and the heads of various muths (monasteries); he saw avarice, he saw carnal desire, he saw lust for power and prestige. In fact he saw everything in such people that was incongruent with saintliness or preceptorship. Ignorance, superstitions, fear complex, false dogmas, bigotry etc. amongst the people helped to augment the number of these hypocrites.

It now fell to this excellent man to work for a change in society. The situation was ripe for it. The times were made for the man and the man was made for the times.

In the years that followed as Sahajanand gathered disciples who, like himself, had lived and breathed in the same social milieu, he spoke of the eternal verities of life, the relevance of *vairagya* and the importance of *bhakti* — devotion. He claimed — and very rightly so — that a society submerged in illiteracy, rotting in hunger, indulging in false beliefs could not possibly be uplifted unless one became one with the people, understood their innermost needs, loved them and set before them an example of rectitude and spoke to them in a language they readily understood. It was Sahajanand's forte that he could communicate and be on the same wave-length as the men he frequently addressed. His rapport with them was complete.

Much of the lyrical poems written by Sahajanand's disciples reflect the value system he inculcated in them. The high morality he preached, the call to *vairagya* (renunciation), detachment from worldly desires and possessions were one aspect of his life. His acceptance with great and equal equanimity the luxuries in ornaments, dress and food offered to him was another aspect of a multifaceted life. Once he remarked: "When I visit great cities like Surat, Vadtal, Baroda and Ahmedabad, my disciples offer me a sumptuous reception, offer me gold and ornaments, rich food, dress and other luxurious articles, but when I meditate inwardly, I enjoy the bliss of Myself so intensely that the riches of this world look insignificant before it." He wanted His disciples to adopt this way of living wherein worldly riches can be easily discarded for the enjoyment of a glorious life in the proximity of the Lord.

But Sahajanand was treated as the Lord Incarnate himself. It is necessary to remember that Sahajanand — Swaminarayan as he came to be known — was the ultimate God. And it was as the living God that he was venerated by his chief disciples. The lyrics are eloquent testimony to this veneration. Consider this lyric by Brahmanand:

Blessed is he, who worships the form Manifested,
For him all the places of pilgrimage are at the feet of
    Hari:
To prostrate at His feet is much more virtuous
Than crores of visit to Kashi.

He bears in heart the elegance of the Lord,
He feels elated by listening to His virtues;
He encompasses in his bare eyes the One,
Who cannot be understood, cannot be fathomed.

He, the Eternal Dancer
Glides into the present with grace;
That beautiful and ravishing form
Is one to the liking of Brahmanand.

Or take this lyric by Muktanand who had great difficulty at first to accept Sahajanand as his guru:

Wherever he looks, only the Lord sees and none else,
Confused he won't be, by the luminaries of the world.
It is because he is inspired by the light of realisation.

When ego vanishes, the Lord is near;
Ego evaporates when you feel yourself a footman to the
Lord;
Muktanand says:
To a great sage, Lord is always at hand manifested.

The Lord Manifested, of course, is Sahajanand, Shree Swaminarayan.

Or again:

Without the Lord manifest,
the thirst will not be quenched...

As the light of the Sun emanates from the Sun
So the manifestation of Brahman
Gleams only through the grace of Guru.
Muktanand, the footman of the Lord says:
Many have known this secret,
And have crossed this ocean of life.

Premanand deals with the same subject in a different way:

To him, the Lord stands in service,
Who with true mind serves
The Master, the Supreme Lord;
Who recognises Him and dedicates,
Mind, action, word, body and wealth.

He does not keep any barrier in his heart,
He of pure heart knows
The greatness of the Master.
Only one desire resides in his heart,
That is to meet the Lord manifested....

The Lord fulfils all his wishes,
Premanand bears the witness
That, to him, the Lord stands in service.

The theme of total surrender to Sahajanand occur frequently in the lyrics by other disciples as well. Take this one by Bhoomanand:

First of all remember the Lord.
Bow often and touch His feet.

He is the Lord of Lords, my Lord,
His name is Naranarayan
Let us bow to His feet.

Let us dedicate everything we have to our Lord
Let us ask for emancipation alone
And bow to His feet.

Bhoomanand says with feeling to the Lord
You keep us in your heart;
And says it, bowing at His feet.

The disciples sometimes put themselves in the place of *gopis* yearning for Krishna and here is an example of this devotion from Premanand's *Premsakhi Padavali*:

The night has passed and the morning dawns,
O Lord, let my eyes rest on you,
and agonies of body and mind shall evaporate.

The sun is shining,
Sages are worshipping
The ladies are churning the curd.

Wasp is humming,
Lotus is blossoming
Lillies are closing their petals.

Awake O Lord of Premanand,
Let me have a look at you, O my gracious Lord!
And pray, nothing untoward turns upon your path.

or

Suddenly I remembered Shreejee, and my heart overflows
with joy;
My heart is agitated by the separation and my eyes are
full of tears.
I recollect the enchanting Maharaj, His eyes like lotus,

His hands moving in rhythm, uttering the nectarful words.

And what to tell about his adorable body?

Crores of cupids cannot match Him;
And His smile inspires affection.

He is the ocean of happiness.

Every day He wears white clothes, though occasionally
gold-rich garbs,
His head-wear is adorned with flowers, and his hands
full of beautiful garlands.

I am pining to see the Lord once more,
I am striving to hear His sweet speech.

My heart yearns for the union with the Lord
Who is the light and life of Premanand.

The unabashed adoration of Sahajanand by his disciples had its origins in the character and personality of the Master himself. He was a lover of Fine Arts. H. T. Dave says "all beauty emanated from Him, in His human manifestation, and He displayed this aesthetic sense and tried to promote it in the groups of His *Paramahamsas* and disciples."

This was not a puritanic religion, shorn of the beautiful and the ornate. Sahajanand encouraged architectural designing, sculpture, handicrafts, music. According to Dave, Sahajanand allowed to flourish Holi festivals, duels, bullock fights and races "to provide a beginning to lift people to higher instincts and raise them to the understanding of finer faculties which are the glimpses of the beauty of *atma*." Nothing human was alien. Sahajanand loved music and dancing. Dave says that "the attraction of His divine form was so impelling that the *Paramahamsas* could not resist the temptation of playing *rasa* with Him." The folk dance which had become an antiquated art through negligence was thus revived for healthy existence.

As with dance, so with music. Sahajanand's *Paramahamsas*, chiefly Premananda, Muktananda, Devananda and Brahmananda were reputed artists and they sang to the lasting glory of their Master.

They also reflected the Master's philosophy, as does Nishkulanand. When Sahajanand accepted luxurious articles, dresses and garlands offered to Him by His disciples, He would tell them: "It is for *your* pleasure and satisfaction that I accept your offerings. When I introvert and look within at the infinite greatness of God and the bliss emanating from Him, all the riches of this world look insignificant."

Again, lest His disciples followed him only in action, but without His divine spirit, he would caution them thus: "It is impossible to get release from the bondage of *maya* if one indulges in and enjoys *pancha visayas* (the five sense objects). I am immune from the pleasures of the riches and luxuries offered to me as I always behave as *Atma* and control my *indriyas, manas, pranas* and *chitta;* whereas you have no control over them and therefore are likely to be enmeshed in the *pancha visayas.*"

The same thoughts are translated by Nishkulanand in his lyric thus:

One who renounces outwardly, but craves from within
Cannot serve to any end:
Such a renunciate will slip from his duties
And glide into the world of meaninglessness....

One who is a renunciate at one moment,
And reveller in physical pleasures at another;
Household man at one moment and forsakes all at
another;

Nishkulanand says:

The renunciation of a man like this
Lacks the depth of understanding.

But the *Paramahamsas* delighted in seeing Sahajanand adorned with garlands and flowers; again it is the *gopi* in love with Krishna, a theme countlessly repeated in Indian devotional lyrics.

Your glance has an attractive aura,
O delightful Lord!

It has enchanted my mind,
O playful Lord!

Your upraised hand filled my heart with joy, O Maharaj, I am in love with your crown of flowers.

O Vrajraj, Your garland of flowers makes us all happy,
Your earrings drive us to adoration.

O Lord, it is a rare sight to see the *tilak* on your forehead,
The turns and twists of your headwear fascinate our mind.

O Lord, You are full of flowers — here, there and everywhere:

I glance at them and lo, my heart is lured.

O Lord, come to our abode with all these embellishments.

Muktanand says:

O Maharaj, Smiling, call on us.

In a very real sense, the Swaminarayan poets were in the rich tradition of Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidas, with but one important difference. The sixteenth century poet-singers referred to God in the abstract but the Swaminarayan poets felt God was with them, manifested in human form, in the person of Sahajanand. They adored him, loved him and felt lost when He was away from them. They enjoyed His company, danced for Him, built for Him, sang for Him. Kabir could say:

My body and my mind are in a depression because you are not with me.

How much I love you and want you in my house!

When I hear people describe me as your bride I look sideways ashamed....

But he was addressing the Impersonal God. To the Swaminarayan poets, however, there was nothing impersonal about Sahajanand. He was with them, in body, mind and spirit. They saw Him in flesh and blood; they ate with Him and were intoxicated with Him. They were in His august presence, listening to His words of wisdom, firm in their conviction that in the adoration of the Master, salvation was a foregone conclusion.

If you have attained the Beloved
then why sleep?

Why desire fleeting bones and skin

when the Beloved — the quintessence of all is with you?

If you are lost and elated in
the Lord, the Charmer,
Feel the ecstasy,
but why weep?

If you are in armour cloaked
to move into the battlefield,
Why then tremble and quiver?

It is the conviction of Muktanand:
that one has to abandon attachment
and concentrate at the feet of the Lord.

It may be hard for a generation brought upon materialism to understand or appreciate the philosophy of Shree Swaminarayan. He was in the world but not of it. A product of his times, he was still the leader and the arbiter. He did not reject life but gloried in it. But in glorying in life he was first to point out its impermanence. The aim of life was to establish harmony with the ultimate Reality but that aim could only be fulfilled in this life. That was Shree Swaminarayan's message. And that is the message in his disciples' lyrics.

VI

A notable comparison can be made between Shree Swaminarayan's message and the message of the Gita, specifically in regard to *Akshar Brahman*. The word *Akshar* has been variously explained as "immutable", "liberated soul", "world soul", "universal soul", "the imperishable soul" or more simply as "letter" or "syllable". There are altogether fourteen passages in the Gita in which the word 'Akshar' appears but among them three (Chapters VIII. 13, X. 25 and X. 33) may be dismissed at once as the meaning 'letter' or 'syllable' is incontestable.

Omityekaksharam brahma vyaharan mamanusmaran
Ya prayati tyajan deham sa yati paramam gatim.

VIII-13

Or in

Maharshinam bhrugu raham ghiramasmeykamaksharam

Yajnanam japayajnosmi sthavaranam Himalaya

X-25

(I am Bhrgu among saints, Om among words, among sacrifice I am Japayajna and the Himalayas among steadfast objects.)

Or again in

Aksharanamakarosmi dwandwa samasikasya cha
Ahamevakshaya kalodhataham vishwathomukah

X-33

(Among letters I am A, among compound words I am dwandwa; I am the endless Time; I am the all-faced regulator.)

But is that all the meaning of '*Akshar*'? Dr. P. M. Mody after studying the different interpretations given to the word by such great philosophers as Sankara and Ramanuja as well as by western scholars such as Garbe, Deussen, Barnett and Hill says: "It is clear that none of them, Indian or European, has endeavoured to study the word in the light of previous and later texts, not even Deussen who having translated Mahabharata, was best equipped for that study."

What *is* akshar, then? What position does it occupy amongst the philosophical entities of *Jiva, Ishwar* and *Maya?* What is its relation to *Purushottam?* Does *Purushottam* transcend *Akshar* as the Upanishads hold, or is *Akshar* the divine abode of Vasudeva? In the Gita, when Arjuna wants to know "Who is this Brahman?" Krishna's answer is categorical: "The immutable *Akshar* is the Supreme Brahman."

Aksharam brahma paramam swabhavodhyatmamuchchyate

(The exhaustless — aksharam — is the supreme Brahma. Own--ness is called Adhyatma. By Karma is meant the parting with objects for the birth and prosperity of creatures.)

Chap. III-3

Here Krishna by saying *aksharam brahma paramam* refers to Akshar as the Supreme Brahman, who is transcended only by Purushottam.

In his *Essays On The Gita,* Shri Aurobindo explains the phrase more clearly. "By that Brahman, a phrase which in the Upanishads is more than once used for the self-existent, as opposed to the phenomenal being, the Gita intends, it appears, the immutable self-existence which is the highest expression of the Divine and on whose unalterable eternity all the rest, all that moves and evolves, is founded: *akshara paramam*."

This interpretation of Shri Aurobindo comprehensively covers all the attributes of *akshar* — the support of all (*sarvaadhar*), the cause of all the causes (*sarva karanakaranam*) etc. It may be said with some certainty that this interpretation is very close to the status that *Akshar* enjoys. Again, explaining the verse:

Yadaksharam vedavidho vadanti
Vishanti yadhyatayo veetaraagaa
Yadichchanto brahmacharyam charanti
Tatte padam sangrahena pravakshye
(VIII-11)

Shri Aurobindo says that which those wise in the Vedas call exhaustless, into which those who, free from attachments, labour for salvation, "that eternal reality is the highest step, place, foothold of being (*padam*); therefore it is the supreme goal of the soul's movement in Time, itself no movement, but a status original, sempiternal and supreme."

Akshar, then, is the highest step (*paramam padam*), it is the supreme goal of the soul's movement (*Brahmabhoota prasannatma*), itself no movement but a status original. Shri Aurobindo, it must be said, comes as close to helping define *akshar* as anyone possibly can.

It is in this context that we may dismiss other interpretations of *akshar* as *purusha* which is the synonym of *purushottam,* or as *prakriti* or *atma,* the individual soul. Any confusion between *atma, purusha* and *brahman* is dispelled by the Chandogya Upanishad where the concepts are clearly defined.

For one of the clearest expositions of *akshar* we have to go to Shree Swaminarayan and his disciples. According to Shree Swaminarayan, *akshar* enjoys a pivotal position, second only to

Purushottam and is indispensable in the scheme of salvation. As he says: "Akshar Brahman pervades Maya and all the cosmic evolutes evolved from Maya and is as such described as possessing an all-pervading influence." In his *Vachanamritam* (translated by H. T. Dave), Shree Swaminarayan notes: "This *akshardham* is in a dual form, firstly as all-pervading *chaitanya*, which is called Chidakash (the divine space) or Brahmamohol, which is formless; secondly this *akshar* (being associated with the Lord as his nearest devotee) is always in the proximity of the Lord in his service."

As Dave explains, "one has to identify onself with the form of this *akshar* to attain the Brahmic state and to offer *para bhakti* to the Lord. *Akshar* manifests with Purushottam in the human form." Shree Swaminarayan Himself is clear about it: "Millions of macrocosms, each encircled by eight spheres, look like atoms before the infinite greatness of *akshar*. This *akshar* is the divine abode of Purushottam Narayan. One has to attain oneness with this *akshar* and with this *aksharbhava* offer worship to Lord Purushottam."

Again He says: "One who is bereft of such desires, and has only one desire to attain identity with *aksharbrahman* and with this *Brahmicbhava* to serve the lotus feet of Shree Purushottam Bhagawan, he alone has attained the *nirvikalpa* samadhi." Brahmanand put it succinctly in one of his lyrics:

It is both the formless and the form,
It is called the *akshar* eternal.
It always shines independently....
Akshar who creates this endless universe,
Manifests His grace in the form,
Millions of Mahavishnus reside in His Body hair,
Immense is the Divine Form.
So I am one with *akshar,* and still independent....
He is called the Formless One.
Now let me explain a deep secret,
How I am grounded in that *akshar*
As the word stay within the sky

> When *akshar* extends its Scheme,
> I take the infinite Forms,
> When *akshar* vanishes in Me
> It shines as One with Me....

Brahmanand comes to the theme again in another of his lyrics:

> Blessed is he, who worships the form Manifested,
> When He dissolves everything and becomes calm,
> For him all the places of pilgrimage are at the feet of Hari:
>
> To prostrate at His feet is much more virtuous
> Than crores of visits to Kashi.
>
> He is beyond *akshar;* he cannot be conquered.
> He is entire.
>
> The scriptures sing of Him as Infinite:
> So distant and yet so near is the Lord, my mind is tranquil in Him.

And why not? *Yad aksharam vedavido vadanti.* The Knowers of Vedas call it *akshara,* the *Pada* or *Dhama* of Paramatma, wherein only the celibates can enter. Consider what the Gita (XII 3-4) says and what Shree Swaminarayan says:

> Yeh tvaksharam anirdeshyam avyaktam paryupasate,
> Te prapnuvanti mam eva....
>
> (Those who adore the imperishable, indefinable, unmanifest.... they too come to me....)

And Shree Swaminarayan:

> It is the cause of all the causes. One which is greater than the other, is the cause of the other, and is subtler than that. Water is greater than the earth and is the cause of the earth and is subtler than the earth. Similarly, fire is greater than water, air is greater than fire, and space is greater than air. Again, egoism, intelligence, Purusha and Prakriti are progressively greater than one another. Above them is *akshara* — the abode of Purushottama — which is greater, subtler and the cause of the evolution or generation of all of them.

It is this *akshara* which is to be known or realised for attaining liberation. The greatness of *aksharadhama* has been described as *yasmin loka nihita lokinash cha tad etad aksharam brahma* — that in whom the Devas reside with their Lokas. It is fully Divine, devoid of all impurities of Maya, *apahat papma hysea brahmalokah* and is the eternal light *brahmajyotih sanatanam*.

Akshara, then, is the abode of Purushottam, is unmanifest (*avyakta*), eternal (*sanatana*) and is thé highest attainment, from which there is no return. It is here that Purushottam resides. It can therefore be inferred that to attain Purushottam, one must first reach *Akshara*; having done that one can then, by further development, reach Purushottam who is higher than *akshara* — *Vasudevah sarvam*.

The Kathopanishad refers to *akshara* as the highest — *etadhyevaksharam param* and prescribes it as the best refuge — *dhyanalam banesu shrestam* resorting to which Purushottam or Paramapurusha, can be meditated upon.

Akshara, therefore, is intrinsically pure (*suddha Brahman*) and is to be sought by the *jivas* which they can do by rejecting their identity with the three bodies — *sthula, sukshma* and *karana*. Its relationship to Purushottam has been described in terms of *drishya--drasta* (what body is to soul), *sharira-sharirin* and *Niyamya-Niyamaka* (the controlled and the controller). Purushottam is the Ultimate Reality beyond which there is nothing. This is true knowledge, but this can be only imparted by a spiritual guru. As the Srimad Bhagavata states:

> Tasmad gurum prapadyeta
> Jijnasuh sreyam uttamam
> Sabde pare cha nishnatam
> Brahmanyupasamasrayam.
>
> (The spiritual seeker must find proper instruction at the feet of the guru who is well-versed in Vedas that lead to the knowledge of God.)

1

HE drinks the cup of love, He, The Seer.
He is entranced with the wine divine:
He is elated with the blissful rapture, He, The Seer.
In a pailful of knowledge and meditation
Is mixed the herbal magic of separation and renunciation:
Spices of truth are commixed into it:
It is swirled by the inspiration of Guru.
The robes of renunciation are intoxicating
The divine thought filters,
Drinking this nectar all became rapt and enthralled,
Suddenly, the attention was centered on the Manifested Divine.
This nectar was tasted by the Goddess of Knowledge,
By Narad, by Shesha, by Bhavani — the Mother Divine;
Shiva and the Sanaks also sipped the drink;
All these elated ones coaxed each other to drink this nectar
And mutually gained the heavenly abodes.
With this intoxication one scales high summits and never descends,
It is the eternal intoxication:
Brahmanand says,
When saints show grace, the cup is made available.

2

BLESSED is he, who worships the form Manifested,
For him all the places of pilgrimage are at the
feet of Hari:
To prostrate at His feet is much more virtuous
than crores of visits to Kashi.
He is beyond Akshar, He cannot be conquered.
He is Entire;
The scriptures sing of Him as Infinite:
So distant and yet so near is the Lord, my mind is
tranquil in Him.
One who worships the Lord is neither overcome by
Maya nor by Time,
Therefore, utters he not desperate words, being devoid
of their influence.
He is installed in that One and the only One,
His mind wavers not hither and thither.
He bears in heart the elegance of the Lord,
He feels elated by listening to His virtues;
He encompasses in his bare eyes the One,
Who cannot be understood, cannot be fathomed.
He the Eternal Dancer
glides into the present with grace;
That beautiful and ravishing form
is one dear to Brahmanand.

3

HOWEVER hard one may endeavour,
Without Vairagya, Tyag cannot survive.

The desire that settles deep into the heart is very
difficult to give up.

Even though he wears the saffron robe of renunciation,
He pines for the world left behind;
One sees it not on the surface,
but within, he is saturated with lust.

Unless one uproots
Desire, anger, pride and greed;
They sprout instantly
When watered by objects of allure.

The seed in the earth is not seen in summer,
But sensual desires and distortions sprout
as clouds rain and jungles bloom.

As iron is to magnet
So are sensual desires to worldly union;
Where there is no union the desire is unseen,
Where union is, desire to enjoy springs.

One who renounces outwardly but craves from within,
Cannot serve to any end:
Such a renunciant will slip from his duties,
and glide into the world of meaninglessness.

Like spoiled milk
Yoga is corrupted by the desire to enjoy:
It cannot yield the butter;
It has now turned into poison.

One who is a renunciant at one moment,
And reveller in physical pleasures at another;
Household man at one moment and forsakes all at another;

Nishkulanand says:
The renunciation of a man like this
Lacks the depth of understanding.

4

I HAVE searched for, explored and chanced upon
the quintessence of the story of the Truth.

Agony starts with the attachment of the body
and it is an unending one.

It takes a little more time
to make him comprehend truth,
Because his constant attachment
is with the five senses.

One who thinks of worldly happiness all the time,
and craves for it in a thousand ways,
Will feel that the talk of renunciation
is just like gulping poison.

In his heart lies incessant desire
merely to fill his own belly;
If we tell him to renounce all
he feels fire all over the body.

He does not have any conviction
of the other world than this;

Nishkulanand feels
One must think a little before
telling anything to such a person.

5

IF you have attained the Beloved,
then why sleep?

Why desire for fleeting bones and skin,
when the Beloved — the quintessence of all — is
with you?

If you are lost and elated in
the Lord, the Charmer,
Feel the ecstasy,
but why weep?

If you are in armour cloaked
to move into the battlefield,
Why then tremble and quiver?

It is the conviction of Muktanand;
that one has to abandon attachment
and concentrate at the feet of the Lord.

6

ONE who is realised, feels
the abode of the Lord in his heart.

He is inspired by the divine light
in whatever he speaks or listens.

Wherever he looks, only the Lord he sees and none else,
Confused he won't be, by the luminaries of the world.

For, he is inspired by the light of realisation.

The feeling that a lion is around
is enough to scare other animals
Ignorance also vanishes
when luminosity of the soul radiates.

When ego vanishes, the Lord is near;
Ego evaporates when you feel yourself
a footman to the lord;

Muktanand says:
To a great sage, Lord is always at hand, manifested.

7

HE who drinks the cup of love,
takes a trail different from all others
His love is neither for the body
nor for the cosmos;

He bears in his heart,
his Lord, the Beloved.

He does not care for worldly ways,
nor for false inhibitions;
He is one with the mood of the Lord.

Blessed is he in three worlds,
Who worships the Lord as Gopi,
Only his devotion is true.

The Lord is at the command of such devotees;
Such alone can remain untouched by desires,
The loving devotee knows this secret
And does not let ego
stand between him and the Lord.

The army of passion, anger, pride and attachment;
cannot dare to come near such a lover:
For him,
Muktanand feels:
Lord resides in his bosom,
and fondles him in charming ways.

8

WITHOUT the Lord manifest,
the thirst will not be quenched.

And as it is, where is He not?

It is like this earth
which is permeated with water,
But the thirst cannot be quenched
without water itself.

One who is full and immanent in the universe,
He is the Master — the Generous One.

He ever manifests in the human form
With one mission or the other,
Only those who are seers,
Know Him.

The same Lord has permeated
Throughout, beyond the movable and the immovable,
very few can give thought to this.

The Vedas praise Him as, beyond mind and speech,
He is like Sky,
Unfathomable.

As the light of Sun emanates from the Sun
So the manifestation of Brahman[1]
Gleams only through the grace of Guru.

Muktanand, the footman of the Lord says:
Many have known this secret,
And have crossed this ocean of life.

---

[1] **Parabrahman.**

9

LISTEN, Oh! dwellers of Vraj, to what I say,
I am telling you a truth deep from my heart.

I will explain giving examples,
The Lord said lovingly.

Such is my divine form,
The Lord said lovingly.

As the birds soar in the sky,
The Lord said lovingly.

Such birds are numberless in the sky,
The Lord said lovingly.

Clouds, lightning and water,
The Lord said lovingly.

All these forms are distinct and different,
The Lord said lovingly.

All settle into that void,
The Lord said lovingly.

As the water settles in snow.
The Lord said lovingly.

Feel that the sky is Akshar,
The Lord said lovingly.

Think of Maya as total darkness,
The Lord said lovingly.

Birds are those numberless beings,
The Lord said lovingly.

Body is form wrapped by eight barriers,
The Lord said lovingly.

The vibrating cloud is Maha Vishnu,
The Lord said lovingly.

Emancipated souls shine like lightning,
The Lord said lovingly.

The rhythms which are inner and lively,
The Lord said lovingly.

They are the powers of Time,
The Lord said lovingly.

It is both the formless and the form,
The Lord said lovingly.

It is called the Akshar eternal,
The Lord said lovingly.

It always shines independently,
The Lord said lovingly.

Maya is defeated by Time,
The Lord said lovingly.

Akshar who creates this endless universe,
The Lord said lovingly.

When Manifests his grace in the Form,
The Lord said lovingly.

Millions of Maha Vishnus reside in His body-hair,
The Lord said lovingly.

Immense is the Divine Form,
The Lord said lovingly.

When He dissolves everything and becomes calm
The Lord said lovingly.

He is called Formless One,
The Lord said lovingly.

Now let me explain a deep secret,
The Lord said lovingly.

How I am grounded in that Akshar,
The Lord said lovingly.

As the word stay within the sky,
The Lord said lovingly.

So I am one with Akshar, and still independent,
The Lord said lovingly.

When diverse skies were created,
The Lord said lovingly.

Word was also deciphered,
The Lord said lovingly.

Corresponding to the power of Akshar,
The Lord said lovingly.

My Form is posed before the universe,
The Lord said lovingly.

When Akshar extends its scheme,
The Lord said lovingly.

I take the infinite Forms,
The Lord said lovingly.

When Akshar vanishes in Me,
The Lord said lovingly.

It shines as One with Me,
The Lord said lovingly.

Brahmanand says:
He has written in this verse,
The words of the Lord as comprehended by him.

10

I AM the eternal, beyond beginning,
everything else is the frailty of life.

I found the Master, who is beyond beginning,
and all my infirmities are gone.

Where is the wood and where is the axe?

Where is the one who forms the shape?

When I mate with my Supreme Master,
All my hunts are over.

What is the lineage? And who are the kith and kin?

Who are the father and the mother?

Who is the brother and who is the sister?

Now my clan is Brahman.

Neither am I born nor would I be dead,
Neither am I bettered nor worsened.

I have remembered my stock and blood,
Let there be no quarrel over this.

Man is made out of the water,
The foul rag and bone store of the heart.

I met the Lord and the work was done,
Now there is attachment to none.

Perhaps some desire was left over,
During my penance in the previous birth,
Lord who knows this,
The endless game of life and birth is just for that.

Whatever was the purpose of this life, is now served;

Nishkulanand says:
I have the Lord manifested before me,
Now I do not have name or place.

11

TO him the Lord stands in service,
Who with true mind serves,
The Master, the Supreme Lord;
Who recognises Him and dedicates,
Mind, action, word, body and wealth
He does not keep any barrier in his heart,
He of pure heart knows,
The greatness of the Master.

Only one desire resides in his heart,
That is to meet the Lord manifested.

One who is true of word, he is of the Lord;
He never returns, to linger in the ocean of births and deaths.

The Lord fulfils all his wishes;
Premanand bears the witness,
That, to him the Lord stands in service.

12

ONLY the true saint enjoys the bliss in this world,
O' Uddhav!

All others constantly burn in the threefold fire,
Only the true saint enjoys the bliss in this world,
O' Uddhav!

Unhappy are all kings, unhappy too, are paupers;
One who earns millions also suffer misery.

Hapless too are those who renounce,
Elated are they in their false physical pride.

The world is enveloped in the darkness of Maya,
Without knowledge joyless it remains;
Muktanand says:
That one who has realised,
Reaches the realm of light.

13

LOVING Sahajanand emerged like the Sun
And banished the darkness of unrighteousness.

For the one desirous of emancipation,
The dark night of Maya is over;
Hari came in his life
and lo, it was full dawn.

Whosoever believed with love
The words of the Beloved,
are sans doubt sans agony.

All the owl-like Pandits of the world, the sinners;
Are now in hiding in the mountains.

The thieves, like passion, anger, greed
have run for their lives,
and find no place to stay.

Looking at the Sun-faced saint
blossomed lotuses;
Sinful lilies withered instantly.

Muktanand says:
The Lord gave us enormous bliss;
I go to him often and often,
to dedicate myself.

14

YOUR glance has an attractive aura,
O' delightful Lord!

It has enchanted my mind,
O' Playful Lord!

Your upraised hand fills my heart with joy,
O' Maharaj, I am in love with your crown of flowers.

O' Vrajraj, Your garland of flowers makes us all happy,
Your earrings drive us to adoration.

O' Lord, it is rare sight to see the tilak on your forehead,
The turns and twists of your headwear, fascinate our mind.

O' Lord, You are full of flowers — here, there and everywhere:
I glance at them, and lo, my heart is lured.

O' Lord, Come to our abode with all these embellishments,
Muktanand says:
O' Maharaj, Smiling call on us.

15

O' LORD, O' Life of this world, Please awake.
Birds twitter sweetly.

O' Lord, wake up and release my sari pressed in your bed.

You are asleep without any thought whatsoever,
O' Lord! But I need to care for the whole world.

My mother-in-law is smart enough;
Your sister is trickster,
They all have peeped in many a time,
Under the pretext of,
Telling me to milk the cow.

I am getting late, O' Lord,
I have yet to churn the curd,
O' Lord of Muktanand,
Isn't this enough?, please awake.

16

O' MY sister, my heart is tranquil today.
The Lord showed grace,
And narrated a tale of world beyond.

Shuka, Narad, Uddhav and others,
Were in the assembly.

The Lord asked of them questions,
Bliss was in their hearts.

He asked: What is the redemption,
Which cannot be accomplished?

When no one was able to respond
Thus spoke the Lord of Vaikuntha.

One who wants emancipation,
Remains afraid of birth and death,
To swim beyond them,
There is only one way,

My divine form;
The scriptures which expound me as Sakar,
And the true saints,
Who knows me with the form and worship Me.

They alone can cross violent currents.

Even if a sinful man conjoins with that Form,
He will easily swim across the ocean of life;
Premanand narrates, just as he has listened:
'Whosoever worships Me, As the Form divine
Will reach My highest Abode.'

17

LET us espouse the Lord
even if it costs the head.

We have taken a step ahead;
we must never retrace.

We fathomed deep into the mind;
We disallowed interruptions from worldly wisdom;
We are prepared to risk the life for the Lord.

Let us not start without knowing what lies on the way;
But once we are in the battlefield,
let there be no fear;
Let us be with water of confidence on our lips.

One who brags braveness at the outset
But retreats cowardly from the battlefield —
with what face he may live ever after?

Let us first take a vow
not to fight at every pretext;
But once we are in the battlefield
be not afraid of being cut into pieces.

Let us recall the Lord's name
with fearless buoyancy;
If we are called we shall not flee:
Says Brahmanand,
We will rather die, than retrace.

18

THE time is haunting you every moment, just think
of it.

Your living is mythical.

Thousands have lost the battle of life
Maya the intriguer has intrigued, just think of it.

However great one may be,
be he a King or a pauper,
Death overcomes him;
Day by day your life is shortened.

O man! You have forgotten the Lord,
You have uttered the hollow speech,
For the sake of luxury, you have roamed here and there.

Says Devanand, just listen to me,
Your youth is wasted,
Why you tend to forget the Lord, just think of it

19

ONE who serves the Lord
Laments neither for the loss nor the gain,
He knows the hollowness of Maya;
Where it is when death approaches.

Evolve magnanimity of mind, avoid pride and jealousy;
Be rich in knowledge and humble in approach
May this be the mode of life.

Whole-heartedly take the path of Bhakti,
Shiv and Sanaks also love
the footman of the Lord.

Goddess of knowledge, Narad and Shuk
also want to be with him,
Devanand says, everyday
they want to hear the word of wisdom from such
a devotee.

20

IN the realm of colours it is only a wet line;
The delicate line is wet with colours.

The forehead of the Lord is adorned by
this engaging arresting line.

To have a look at that line, O Lord —
I have put on these Saffron robes.

On that line great sages meditate day and night,
Purified, it shines on the body of the dark coloured
Lord.

Just a glance at it and the sins of the past births are
burnt,
agonies of the body dissolved,
And will lead to the other shore of the stream of life.

Your face, O Lord, is fullmoon capturing the heart.

Devanand fixes his eyes on it;
He wants to swim across this life stream.

21

THE Lord has still not enquired after me;
Adverse clouds have started raining.

It drizzles and sways;
For a moment, clouds descend
and the next they ascend.

I stare constantly from the balcony
and the intent gaze exhausts my eyes,
Without the Lord, I cannot think of any thing,
I wonder, when will He come and embracingly take me
in His lap.

Devanand, without the manifestation of my Lord,
It is sheer agony; the love turns into tears
and flows from eyes.

22

THE night has passed and the morning dawns,
O Lord, let my eyes rest on you,
and agonies of body and mind shall evaporate.

The Sun is shining
Sages are worshipping,
The ladies are churning the curd.

Wasp is humming,
Lotus is blossoming,
Lilies are closing their petals.

Awake O Lord of Premanand,
Let me have a look at you, O my Gracious Lord!
and pray, nothing untoward turns upon your path.

23

TO whom shall we tell the secrets of our hearts,
O Lord!

Without you in whom do we confide?

Without you O Lord
Our days and nights are in total unhappiness.

You are the ocean of happiness O Lord,
in it, we glide like fish.

Our life is fixed in you O Lord,
Like a design on the cloth.

O Dearest of Premsakhi,
without you, we shall pine and end the life.

24

SUDDENLY I remembered Shreejee, and my heart
overflows with joy;
My heart is agitated by the separation and my eyes are
full of tears.

I recollect the enchanting Maharaj, His eyes like lotus,
His hands moving in rhythm, uttering the nectarful
words.

And what to tell about his adorable body?

Crores of cupids cannot match Him;
And His smile inspires affection,
He is the ocean of happiness.

Every day He wears white clothes, though occasionally
gold-rich garbs,
His headwear is adorned with flowers, and his hands
full of beautiful garlands.

I am pining to see the Lord once more,
I am striving to hear His sweet speech,
My heart yearns for the union with the Lord,
Who is the light and life of Premanand.

25

HAIL O' Pretty, Tender and Eliminator of enemies;
Hail O' Sahajanand, the dweller of Akshardham;

You are my life, You are my eyes,
You are the Giver of all my boons.

Hail O' Sweet, O' delicate, O' soft-speaking
Hail O' Master of gait and Charmer with a smile.

Hail O' Lotus-faced, O' Lotus-eyed
and One with the lotus in the hand.

Hail O' Beauty incarnate, Generous in granting desires,
Hail O' courteous and Loving one;
Hail O' abode of compassion,
Hail O' Commisserator,
Hail O' Master of the Goddess of Wealth, Eternal.

You are the one worth worshipping, worth prostrating to,
and the one Who ends all agonies;
You are the Master of my being and Radiator of happiness;
O' Lord, grant me unflinching intellect,
to keep my love rooted at your feet.

Premanand says:
I offer my total self;
You grant me your total love.

26

HE is truely my attendent, Uddhav,
Yes, he is truly my attendant.

He doesn't love this world nor the universe,
He makes his abode at My feet.

The world is confined in the trap of woman and gold.

He is above all these.

He has imbibed devotion through practice,
He stays in his house like a guest.

He is detached from mind, senses and actions.

He is singularly devoted to Me alone,
Muktanand, Just glance in the heart of such a saint,
You will find my Divine light.

27

LISTEN O man to my words,
If you do not take shelter in Hari, the Master of Riches, (Laxmi)
You will find miseries day and night.

The feet of the Lord is a tree of desired fruits,
If one foresakes them, he will be trapped by temptations, time and actions;
He will eat his head in desperation and repent.

Evenings and mornings he is drenched in passion and evil action
His desires are on the half way;
Soon he lands in the clutches of death.

Neither money nor woman will accompany on that path,
Neither son, nor parents will be there,
Premanand says, one who doesn't worship the Lord,
Remains desolate, abandoned.

28

LOITER like a Mendicant O friend!
Roam in this land afar.

The Master is the only shelter, The Master the only hope,
Be happy in His nearness, be detached from all others.

Do not doubt, do not desire, do not want,
Be above taste, let not ego touch you,
These limits you preserve with care.

Be happy with the Lord, stay away from women, and wealth,
Drink the nectar of love; get drunk, be carefree!

He is a real mendicant, who listens to the inspiring Word,
Shrirang, teachings of the master are communicated through single gesture.

And lo! he is ready to receive.

29

THE colour of the body is just like a butterfly,
It shall fade away in no time.

Right before your eyes, look!
millionaires vanished
With all their cherished left behind.

They anoint their bodies with perfumes:
Decorate their heads with turbans;
Their very being reflects the ego
Youth and wealth sway their gait.

He is like a mouse who has tasted wine,
Intoxicated he ambles;
Twists his body in ego,
And utters indiscriminate words!
He thinks too much of himself,
Believes that all qualities reside in him.

Only he knows not:
a cat has an eye on him,
In no time he will be pounced upon and eaten.

'I' will hardly submerge in today or tomorrow,
The kinsman of Death will encage the 'I'.

Brahmanand warns:
O' ignorant one,
ridicule awaits you at the end.

30

SOMETIMES He sits in the assembly
Saints and devotees staring at Him:
When Lord himself is in meditation,
Who will dare lift his eyes from Him?

Saints sing and play instruments
The Lord anchors His mind amidst them;
The Lord becomes one with the song.

He bids a devotee to recite from the scripture.

The Lord of Premanand becomes enthralled
in the tale and merges with all in the assembly.

31

I AM in love with my Lord
and I know His subtle approaches
I have taken an irrevocable pledge in my heart,
I have realised the sublime discrimination
I want my Lord and nothing else,
I have chanted His name with the chimes of the time.

My avowal is to admire
and play with the Lord of Muktanand.

32

DON'T behave like this O Lord! on the open road,
Lest you forget, that someone may see us.

Day and night you stand in my way
How can I go and fetch a pail of water?

We care for social blame
and are afraid when you encounter us;

Oh Lord of Brahmanand! be considerate,
Do not wander with these playful airs!

33

I AM your footman O' Master of Raghu dynasty;
I become fulfilled, only when I prostrate at your
feet:
United with you my love grows stronger and stronger.

Eight accomplishments I want not,
nor do I want nine treasures;
My all desires remain fulfilled,
When I mediate on Your Lotus feet
and chant incessantly Your Name.

O' adorner of Raghu dynasty,
even Shesh cannot fathom your glory,
The Lord of Muktanand has taken
the human form for all of us.

34

THE Lord thought thus in His mind:
"Should my father and mother see My Divine Form,
they may stand stunned and may not dare come close to me.

Without imparting love to their child they will not find happiness."

Thinking thus, He contracted His Divine form.

He thought:
"Were I just a child to them
they would serve me with devotion."

Lord withdrew His divine form
and pervaded it with Maya:
Both father and mother were overjoyed with affection,
They made the Child cling to their necks.

All the people came to know
that Premvati has given birth to a son
The Lord of Muktanand was thus manifested:
And every house turned into a house of joy.

35

LET us go together in a group O' sisters!
gently we shall swing our Beloved,
the son of Nand.

We shall swing Him with love;
One after another we shall keep Him on move;
We shall glance at His eyes for a moment;
Fruitful will be our birth on this earth.

In solitary moments we shall chat
with our Beloved,
Alone we shall meet Him
and heartburns shall vanish.

In the rhythm of Malhar,
We shall sing the songs of the swing;
We shall have the gayest of time
With the Lord of Brahmanand.

36

A TALE comes to my mind:
I have given it much thought.

A man of unsteady mind got a berth in a ship,
The fool thought that he is put into a jail.

He felt giddy when the ship was on the move.

He thought that now everything is over,
He faced gusty winds and was agitated;
In true seafarers he saw enemies.

A cyclone came,
The ship started wobbling,
In anguish he jumped into the sea.

Who is to be blamed?

When one gets the company of the realised ones,
He can either take it, or leave it.

This man — he abandoned joy and jumped in the ocean
of agony.

He was inadequate to the task.
Nishkulanand says,
If we are prepared to bear all elations
and woes of the ship,
Perhaps we can cross the ocean
and reach the shore.

37

TO be with a saint is sheer ecstasy.
Always be with a saint.

When one comes across a saint,
he rises above expectation and greed.

His jealousy, pride, affection, hatred
and attachment burn in a moment.

The infallible knowledge of God
dawns in his heart.

Narad attained sagehood
in the company of saints;
He became the very mind of the Lord;
He emancipated many fallen
and down-trodden,
His fame echoes in all directions.

Staying with saints
Shuk and others became realised souls:
They attained bliss:
Their minds were fixed at the feet of the Lord.

They were able to fathom
unseen meaning of life.

Glory to the saint
Whose company frees from the web of Maya
and enhances love for the Lord
Without any care of worldly things, Says Muktanand.

38

HE is the one who loves my beloved!
Why to forsake his company?

Whom else to worship?

May it rain bolts and arrows,
When he is present, have no doubts:
The mortal body may stumble at the first step
But the soul within will meet the released souls.

Even if the saint asks us
To sleep on gallows
do not abandon him.

Wicked men may utter foul speeches
bear with them with tolerance.

The saint is the one who tells
the tale of the Lord
in nectar-sweet words:
Brahma and Sanak rush to have a glance
of such a saint.

A wicked man's face is fouler than the hell
Muktanand, in his ecstasy begs for
abode amidst the released souls.

39

HE, the Beloved has eyes like lotus;
Lotus eyes tranquilize my being.

Eyes bloom like a lotus
Eyebrows loom like a juice-hunting wasp.

Enchanting thoughtful smile bestows a rapture
Playful glance of Lord suggest the oneness.

He the beloved takes cows to the pasture on the shore
of Yamuna,
and plays a fascinating tune with his flute.

Premanand also enjoys the music
along with the women of Vraj
and dedicates all his prayers
at His feet.

40

FIRST of all remember the Lord.
Bow often and touch His feet.

He is the Lord of Lords, my Lord,
His name is Nara Narayan,
Let us bow at His feet.

Let us dedicate everything we have
to our Lord
Let us ask for emancipation alone
and bow at His feet.

Bhoomanand says with feeling to the Lord,
You keep us in your heart,
and says it, bowing at His feet.

41

NO one belongs to anyone O man!
This is the lesson of life.

Only the Lord belongs to all:
No one else belongs to anyone.

Scriptures and saints emphasise this fact
Why O fool, strive for the so-called relatives?

All the relatives are selfish
They are like wayfarers at the inn,
They will arise and go their way
They are not your companions.

Bhoomanand says, mighty kings and warriors
have departed from the world
leaving their chariots, horses
and elephants behind.

42

THIS comradeship is all false:
Who else is your master except the Lord?

Mother, Father, brother and sister
They are not yours, they belong to themselves.

Amidst them your attachment for a woman
is like a drop of a poison.
All these relatives are your enemies.

You take pride in them —
They are like the hood of the serpant.

Worthless lore has taken the toll of your senses
Nishkulanand repeats this truth
If you are keen to hear.

43

THE dark-complexioned Lord is sleeping in the cradle.
The brother of Balaram — the dark-complexioned one.

Shiv, Brahma and sages have assembled to view Him,
The place of Nand is a mass of persons
Sages and deities are glancing at the Divine Infant
Eyes are full with the tears of love and joy.

Deities, Brahma and sages are praying to the Lord
To remove obstacles, agonies.

Premanand's Lord,
the master of immortals,
is born as a cowherd's child.

44

PROTECTIVE thread looks charming on the right
hand of the Lord.
He is wearing the yellow dress with a studded diadem
on head.

Ladies galore from every house have assembled to see
Him.

Mother also requests the child to manifest His Divine
form.

O my Darling Lord, let your captivating face be
protected by my blessings.

All the Vraj-women are fascinated by your charms.

Whosoever are your enemies, may they be destroyed
earlier,
Brahmanand says,
let your servant get the perennial Bliss.

45

I HOLD Him in my eyes with utmost care,
I hold the Lord in my eyes.

He is the one for whom
Shiva, Sanaka, Shuka and other divinities
wait from eternity.

I bestow my total being
on the form of the Playful Lord.

I glance at Him and absorb Him
in the heart through my eyes:
I take pleasure in praising Him
day and night.

Premanand says:
The name of Hari is nectar,
with love I taste the nectar all the time.

46

I AM on the way to meet my Lord,
O' mother, please don't stop me.

I want to imbibe Him in the heart,
Don't utter any intimidating words.

I shall positively go and meet the darling of Nand,
My beloved is He, the Supreme lover.

He who glides into the groves of Vraj
is One who sustains my life.

O' mother, I warn you, don't stop me,
I shall risk my head and go.

For the sake of Lord of Premanand,
My total being is at the altar of sacrifice.

47

I DO not want to participate in the festival of colours,
This festival shall not emancipate us from birth and
death.

I don't want to become either animate or inanimate,
Why to carry the weight of life in any shape?

The kinsman of Death
makes us dance at his bidding
No other course is there.

Brahmanand says:
The Lord is his resort
The Lord — the Purushottam.

48

REMEMBER the lotus feet of
Shree Ghanshyam, O' my mind!

One who recalls the Lord gets Supreme Bliss,
he is free from birth and death.

If you want all to be well with you
Listen and comprehend, adhere to my words:
Premanand says:
The lotus feet of the Lord
are succour to the helpless.

49

O' LORD, you should not have done this;
You abandoned us on the way!

You cheated us by a trick
and pushed us in the ocean of misery!

How shall we live now?

Whom shall we look at?

With whom shall we sit?

Whose talks can give us solace now?

To whom shall we tell our miseries?

It seems that a mountain of unhappiness has crushed us;
Or is it the ocean of agonies that presses us?
that drowns us?

Sahajanand the Supreme Lord is now away from our
sight.

All our meritorious deeds have come to an end:
Without you, there are thorns of unhappiness all around.

We are now the most unfortunate, all our gains are lost.

Such sorrowful days were destined, we knew it not,
Where were they, when you were with us?

How could we dream that in this dense forest,
You will part company with us?

Why isn't the sky falling?

Why doesn't the earth give way?

Why is this sinful body not decaying?

Why is the black serpent sparing us it's bite?

Now that the Lord is not with us,
How is it that we are still alive?

This is the ultimate limit of sorrow,
If this is not misery, what else is it?

Premanand in his helplessness beseeches :
O' Lord, come to our rescue and save us.

50

ACCOMPLISH the fantastic spectacle O' man!

Keep your breath in control and perform the amazing
show;
You shall be a true trouper
Only if you can entertain
The Supreme Master.

The summoning drum in wonderment sounds.
Sight-seers have thronged in plenty:
Stumble not, lest, ridicule be your fate.

Let the bamboo of fearlessness stand erect,
you be the confidence incarnate.

Think not of your body,
but ascend to the glory of God.

Let your waist be protected by the thread of love.
Let your mind be set on Lord eternal;
You have to walk on the edge of discrimination,
lest you falter.

You are truly the servant of the Lord,
if you perform well;
Brahmanand says;
The Supreme Master's reward is
The Bliss and dwelling in the abode of Brahman.

51

THE love of the Lord is Supreme:
We are fools,
if we think that worldly love can match it.

Just think of the agony
of dwelling in mother's womb,
how can one sustain life there?

Only the Lord
feeds us there
and cares till birth.

Whenever we are in difficulties,
He looks after us;
Who else can match this love?

which is impossible to believe
without experiencing.

One who does not comprehend
tries to loiter in vanity;
Nishkulanand says:
Such a man
decays in the company of the vile.

52

LEST you forget:
this beautiful body
will turn into ashes.

Lest you forget:
this body is
neither yours nor mine.

Lest you forget:
the charm of the body
is fleeting and fading.

Lest you forget:
the body when lowered into earth,
will be just the earth.

Lest you forget:
though the body is fair,
you have to think of its fate.

Lest you forget, says Nishkulanand:
the Swami is the only source of happiness

53

I AM the incarnation of Jadbharat,
Pleasures I desire not;
The worldly objects are like pestilence,
I want them not.

We shall wear the tattered rags,
we shall not aspire for new clothes;
Be it cold, be it hot
a piece of saffron cloth will suffice.

We shall never seek the six tastes,
we shall eat whatever is given;
Living in humility, we shall be joyful
and contented in the mind.

We shall forsake worldly love,
We shall love and pray Lord Krishna;
We still remember that in a previous birth
a yearling stood between us and deliverance.

We shall bear the pleasure,
the sorrow,
the loss, the gain,
the joy, the grief.

Nishkulanand says
We shall see
that our clan
remains without taint.

54

YOUR intelligence has played havoc;
you are busy with varied plans;
You are on the way
in the dark, dense night.

You are carrying the dead weight of worthlessness,
You are consulted among worldly folks;
Truly you are ruined,
you are now doomed O' fool!

When old age will approach,
your heartburns shall increase.

Death will cling to your neck
and ease out your breath;
It shall take you away instantly
and as a thief shall you be treated.

O' slow of intellect!

Why don't you heed to good words?

You are trapped by the string of time.

Nishkulanand says:
If it is so,
You very well know
Lord is not to be blamed.

Born in 1930, Shri Harindra Dave is a versatile person. Currently the Editor of "Janmabhumi" a popular Gujarati daily, Shri Dave is a poet, critic, novelist, play-wright and essayist. Though winner of many Government awards and prizes, it is the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for his collection of poems — **Hayati** — that brought him national renown.

"The Cup of Love", an English rendering of the original poems written in Gujarati by the Swaminarayan saint-poets, is the latest offering from the imaginative pen of Shri Dave.

AKSHAR PURUSHOTTAM TRUSTS

Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Sanstha a Registered Public Charitable Trust, was founded in 1906 by Swami Shree Yajnapurushdasji, a great exponent of the Swaminarayanan philosophy. From small beginnings, the Sanstha has grown into a gigantic institution having several centres in India and abroad like Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Rhodesia, South Africa, U.K., U.S.A. and Canada. In making the Sanstha what it is today, its founder Swami Shree Yajnapurushdasji played a prominent role.

In keeping with the Swami Narayan doctrine — social service with spiritual Sadhana — the Sanstha is rendering yeoman service to the society by conducting educational institutions, running free medical aid centres and organising relief work during natural catastrophes.

With a view to accelerate the activities in the social welfare front, another charitable trust in the name and style of Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Charitable Trust was formed in 1973.

The present spiritual head H. H. Swami Narayanswarupdasji is fifth in the spiritual heirarchy. As President of both the Trusts, the Pramukh Swamiji is inspiring his followers to continue the great work of social and spiritual upliftment.

The registered offices of both the Trusts are located at Shahi Baugh Road, Ahmedabad-380 004. In Bombay, the Trusts have their co-ordinating offices at Akshar Bhavan, Swami Jnanjivandas Marg, Swaminarayan Chowk, Dadar, Bombay-400 014.